

**ARRIVING AT THE “PROPER” MORAL CHOICE:  
PITTSBURGH CATHOLICS FOR OBAMA AND THE  
ISSUES OF SOCIAL JUSTICE**

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This thesis argues that in crafting a nuanced stance on 2008 Democratic Presidential nominee Barack Obama’s “pro-choice” position, and by bringing to attention other key issues in his platform which coincided with important ethical concerns of Catholic thought, Pittsburgh Catholics for Obama (PCO) made various interventions into a public sphere where positions of progressive Catholics had not been prominently featured during the last decade. In order to understand the phenomenon of PCO both within and beyond its immediate political contexts, this project pursues three frames of inquiry which correspond to the thesis chapters. The first chapter situates PCO within the context of the theoretical issues raised by the debates that have ensued in the last thirty years on the question of religion and the public sphere, and secularism. The second offers a socio-historical perspective that places PCO within the post-Vatican II history of American Catholic political participation, thought and activism. Finally, the third chapter undertakes an ethnographic account of PCO’s activism in order to provide a description and analysis of the group’s engagement with the public sphere.

The thesis shows that PCO positioned itself at the edge between a separatist Catholic culture and a political culture of the “common good” that seeks alliances and compromises with other political and cultural groups with whom it can share Catholic-informed but not restrictive principles of Catholic social teaching. By bringing together refined methods of grassroots

activism in combination with the crafting of thoughtful public arguments that amplify particular tenants of Catholic social teaching, PCO carved out a space in the public sphere where its members could support a “pro-choice” presidential candidate while remaining loyal to Catholic ethical traditions.

This thesis contributes to present-day scholarly discussions on the tension between exclusivist secularism and public religions in American political discourse. It analyzes the changing reality of the recent political positions of American Catholics from “single-issue voting” (abortion) to a search for common ground. Furthermore, it contributes to the study of the conflicted relationship between religion and politics as it has taken place in the American public sphere during last decade.

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 PITTSBURGH CATHOLICS FOR OBAMA**

On August 23, 2008, the Pittsburgh chapter of Catholics for Obama held its first official meeting. Under the guidance of the Obama campaign's Catholic Vote Director, a couple dozen Catholic citizens from the greater Pittsburgh area passionately discussed their personal reasons for backing Barack Obama in his quest for the presidency. Citing the ethical matrix of Catholicism as a primary source for their political views, many expressed anger over well-known failures of the Bush administration—the unjust war in Iraq, the mishandling of the Hurricane Katrina humanitarian crisis, the implementation of torture in the so-called war on terror, and the dismantling of environmental protection policies (to name a few). Others articulated a hope that Obama would bring competency and civility to Washington, D. C., heal a politically divided nation, and bring an end to the amoral policies of the Bush administration. Conspicuously, the participants seemed reluctant to address the thorny issue hanging over all of their heads: Obama's promise to protect and strengthen abortion rights. But by the end of this meeting, the group acknowledged the urgent need to account for this aspect of Obama's platform in a way that, over the coming months, might induce the highly coveted Pennsylvania Catholic electorate to vote for Obama. Pittsburgh Catholics for Obama was clearly searching for a way of coming

together in order to constitute a voice that would allow them to participate as a Catholic political agent in the arena of political discourse.

This thesis inquires into how members of Pittsburgh Catholics for Obama (PCO) crafted a nuanced stance on Obama's "pro-choice" position and brought attention to the other key issues in the Obama platform which coincided with important ethical concerns of Catholic thought. Building on Obama's stated desire to reduce abortions by healing the social ills that cause them, PCO publicly urged local Catholics to abandon the "one-issue voter" mentality and consider where Obama and his opponent, John McCain, stood on a broader series of moral issues: the war in Iraq, torture, U. S. militaristic imperialism, environmental protection, and care for the poor. In doing so, PCO argued that Obama's platform aligned, for the most part, with Catholic social teaching and provided a space for local Catholics to participate in politics not only as "Democrats," but also as "Catholics." Given the Catholic church's stance on abortion – a sin in all instances – supporting Obama clearly posed an ethical dilemma for Catholics. This thesis provides a narrative and an analysis of how PCO thought through this dilemma by deploying the Church's teachings on the common good together with a critique of the failure of the Republican Party to deliver on its promises to overturn the *Roe v. Wade* decision. By finding a point in which they could make the tenants of the common good converge with a critique of Republican promises regarding the issue of abortion, PCO found a way of arriving at the "proper" moral choice in relation to the dilemmas posed by the platforms of the 2008 presidential candidates.

In laying down the basis for a critical understanding of the religious and political activism of PCO and its significance in the larger question of the relations of Catholic discourse to the public sphere<sup>1</sup> in recent American history (post-Second Vatican Council), I pursue three frames

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<sup>1</sup> The public sphere is the influential concept developed by Jürgen Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, first published in German in 1962 and translated into English in 1991. It is "an area of public life

of inquiry for my project. First, I question the PCO phenomenon from the perspective of the theoretical issues raised by the current debate on religion, the public sphere, and secularism. Second, I bring to my inquiry a socio-historical perspective, placing the PCO phenomenon within the post-Vatican II history of American Catholic political participation and thought. Finally, in view of the fact that I am dealing with a phenomenon that is occurring in a time concurrent with my own, I employ ethnographic description and interpretation of the fieldwork I conducted in the fall of 2008 and the interviews with individual PCO members carried out in the winter of 2009. These ethnographic interviews provide us with direct access to group members' own understanding of their political and religious participation in the public sphere. In other words, I will attempt to provide answers to the question: To what extent did members of PCO participate as Catholics in the political process and not just as Democrats?

In my thesis, I examine how three prominent participants in PCO, Nicholas Cafardi,<sup>2</sup> Patricia McCann,<sup>3</sup> and Michael Drohan<sup>4</sup> negotiated the tensions between Catholic teaching on abortion and their desire to support other positions in the Obama platform that were in concert with Catholic social teaching. The thesis investigates to what extent the reasoning of PCO members was influenced or supported by the arguments and positions on the "common good" in

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within which a debate about public issues can be developed, leading to the formation of an informed public opinion. A number of institutions are associated with the development of a public sphere – the formation of the state, newspapers and periodicals, the provision of public spaces such as parks, cafés and other public spaces – as well as a culture which favors a public life." See *Penguin Dictionary of Sociology*, 5th ed., s.v. "public sphere." Habermas argued that the Middle Ages had no public sphere in this modern sense. "Only in the eighteenth century, with the breakdown of religious hegemony and the rise of the middle class, does the public sphere emerge. The liberal model of the public sphere, in which private individuals and interests regulate public authority and in which property owners speak for humanity, is eventually transformed during the nineteenth and twentieth century into a realm in which the activities of reasoning and the formulation of public opinion are superseded by mass consumption and publicity" See *Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism*, s.v. "Habermas, Jürgen."

<sup>2</sup> Nicholas Cafardi is the current Dean of the Duquesne University Law School.

<sup>3</sup> Patricia McCann is a Sister of Mercy nun at Carlow University.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Drohan is a former missionary (Spiritan Order) and priest who now serves as the President of the Board of The Thomas Merton Center.

Catholic thought,<sup>5</sup> made explicit by Alexia Kelley and Chris Korzen in their recent book, *A Nation for All: How the Catholic Vision of the Common Good Can Save America from the Politics of Division* (2008). *A Nation for All* advances the fundamental notion that “the common good” is not simply a political idea of modern republicanism, but is a profoundly Catholic political and ethical matrix of thought and action and as such constitutes a bridge for Catholics who want to see the social policies of the government in closer alignment to Catholic social principles.<sup>6</sup>

In view of the fact that PCO’s position constituted, according to the mainstream media, a reversal of the expectations of how Catholics would vote, I also try to assess the kinds of solutions to the dilemmas that PCO faced by choosing to support Obama. A series of more specific questions ensues from this assessment. For instance, did PCO find, create or expand spaces in the public sphere for their Catholic informed consciences or should we regard PCO as another example of “Catholic capitulation to the American way of life”?<sup>7</sup> Is PCO a successful example of the abandonment of the Roman Catholic Church’s policy of cultural separatism?<sup>8</sup> Is it a culture of political action and engagement with the world as recommended by Vatican II, influenced by the writings of John Courtney Murray and twentieth century Catholic activism such as the Catholic Worker movement, Young Christian Workers, *Commonweal* magazine and

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<sup>5</sup> David Hollenbach discusses the notion of the “common good” in his book *The Common Good and Christian Ethics* (2002). He writes that “the quality of relationships among the citizens of the earthly city, both Christians and not, should reflect something of the love of the heavenly city. Christians should treat non-Christians as fellow citizens, not as adversaries or enemies. Christians can enter into the life of the *polis* with a spirit marked by a solidarity grounded in love of their neighbors. This means engaging in both mutual efforts to discern the civic good and joint action for this good together with fellow citizens.” See David Hollenbach, *The Common Good and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 129.

<sup>6</sup> Chris Korzen and Alexia Kelley, *A Nation For All: How the Catholic Vision of the Common God Can Save America From the Politics of Division* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008), 3-9.

<sup>7</sup> Paula M. Kane, *Separatism and Subculture* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 13.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

the Christian Family movement?<sup>9</sup> Is PCO a kernel in the efforts described by Kelley and Korzen to bring “Christian principles to the solution of social problems”<sup>10</sup> and if so, what kinds of negotiations have taken place or are expected to take place between the ideology of exclusionary secularism and the place of religion in the public sphere? My discussion of these questions is informed in part by the theoretical work of José Casanova on “public religions,” by Williams Connolly’s questioning of the limits of secularism and by David Hollenbach’s call for “intellectual solidarity”<sup>11</sup> on the future space for the engagement of politics and religion.

My thesis argues that in crafting a nuanced stance on Obama’s “pro-choice” position and by bringing to attention other key issues in the Obama platform which coincided with important ethical concerns of Catholic thought, PCO made various interventions into a public square, where positions of progressive Catholics had not been prominently featured during the last decade. Moreover, PCO seems to have positioned itself at the edge between a separatist Catholic culture that is still important and alive and a political culture of the “common good” that seeks alliances and compromises with other political and cultural groups with whom they can share Catholic-informed but not restrictive principles enunciated in Catholic Social Teaching. By bringing together refined methods of grassroots activities in combination with the crafting of this careful nuanced position, PCO carved out a space in the public sphere where they could participate from Catholic ethical sources. Further, while the phenomenon of PCO can probably be explained largely from a historical approach, it will also be of interest to relate the dilemma and the tensions experienced by PCO to the current debates on secularism and religion in the

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<sup>9</sup> Korzen and Kelley, 21.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> David Hollenbach, S.J. *The Common Good and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 137-170.

public square as the group seems to be yet another example of religiously informed political activity within a once decidedly exclusionary secular culture and country.

In the introduction to their compilation on ethnographies of American religions, Penny Edgell Becker and Nancy Eiesland argue that ethnography “can be a generative location for the restructuring of scholarship on a changing social reality, not just a place from which to debunk work that has gone before.”<sup>12</sup> They further contend that “ethnography is a method uniquely suited to challenging the conventional wisdom, for subjecting large-scale theories to empirical examination, for generating data on new phenomena, and for generating new theories or insights on the subjects we thought we already knew.”<sup>13</sup> From this understanding, PCO may demonstrate on a local level, this challenge to conventional wisdom on the legitimacy of secularism that Taylor, Connolly and other theorists have been engaging in during the last two decades. In addition, PCO appears to represent the changing reality of the political positions of Catholics in the United States at the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century.

In analyzing the nuanced position of Pittsburgh Catholics for Obama, this paper is informed by some of the theoretical issues presented by José Casanova (1994), Peter Berger (1999), William Connolly (1999), David Martin (2005), and Charles Taylor (2007) on questions of secularism,<sup>14</sup> secularization,<sup>15</sup> and religion in the public sphere. Although in its initial conception, secularism was designed to provide protection against sectarian conflict within predominantly Christian states in Western Europe, secularism has at this point, according to

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<sup>12</sup> Penny Edgall Becker and Nancy L. Eiesland, “Developing Interpretations: Ethnography and the Restructuring of Knowledge in a Changing Field,” in *Contemporary American Religion: An Ethnographic Reader*, ed. Penny Edgall Becker and Nancy L. Eiesland (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press, 1997), 18.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>14</sup> *The Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* defines secularism as “indifference to or rejection or exclusion of religion and religious considerations,” <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/secularism> (accessed April, 2009).

<sup>15</sup> “Secularization originally meant the transfer of power from the church to the state, but in its contemporary usage it signifies the decline of religion in society” See *Penguin Dictionary of Sociology*, 5th ed., s.v. “secularization.”

Taylor and Connolly, have also created practices “too dogmatic and terse to sustain the creative tension needed between democratic governance and critical responsiveness to” changes in the politics of identity.<sup>16</sup> Within this analysis, secularism is held to have become and continues to operate in a restrictive and reductive manner. If that is the case, despite the eruption of religion in the public square in the 1980’s described and analyzed by Casanova, it is necessary to ask to what extent is PCO’s desire to be heard as a political agent in the electoral process a form of engaging and negotiating with the forces of secularism as depicted by these theorists. PCO can provide a good ground where to test some of the important claims made by these theorists on the relationship of secularism to religiously informed political action. Indeed PCO may provide an important example of how the kind of restrictive secularism these theorists postulate is insufficient for democratic societies in which a plurality of perspectives and truth claims are essential for public debate and discourse. The question of a public sphere that is capable of truly accommodating our present sense of plurality is central to both Casanova and Connolly. Their critique of the restrictiveness of secularism is in part a critique of Habermas’s concept of the public sphere.

Casanova regards his study on the public reemergence of religions as a challenge to Habermas’s secular theory of modernity as Casanova finds his model “too rigid.”<sup>17</sup> For Habermas it would seem that religion is only an “anachronism or a residue without much future....In Habermas’ model, conventional religion ought to be superseded by post-conventional secular morality.”<sup>18</sup> Connolly, in his chapter, “The Conceits of Secularism,” goes even further in his critique of Habermas’ concept of the public sphere and its relation to “securing secular

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<sup>16</sup> William Connolly, *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 6.

<sup>17</sup> José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 231.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

authority.”<sup>19</sup> He contends that contemporary secularists attempt to secure authority with a “cluster of protectionist strategies against,” amongst others, “(a) the intrusion of ecclesiastical theology into public life; (b) the academic and public legitimacy of nontheistic, non-Kantian philosophies; (c) the exploration of the visceral register of thinking and intersubjectivity.”<sup>20</sup> Connolly argues that these strategies are pursued in the name of “protecting the authority of deliberative argument in the secular public sphere.”<sup>21</sup> He further shows that these strategies stem from Habermas’s conception of the public sphere in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Connolly’s remedy to this protectionist set of tactics and to the subsequent restrictive nature of the secular space calls for an “ethos of engagement”<sup>22</sup> that includes all those positions excluded by the secularist tactics of protectionism. To some extent, the ongoing critique and debates of secularism seem to devolve on a critical engagement with Habermas’s conception of the public sphere as a sphere of debate that excluded religiously based positions.

In addition, the very recent work of these scholars represents a vigorous challenge to our received ideas on the history of secularization, not only in the West, but in the world as a whole. This challenge is important to students of religion because, as Berger (1999) Casanova (1999), and Martin (2005) show, secularization has not spread evenly over all sectors within any given specific nation. Such is the case of the United States. Nor has it expanded to all nations of the globe at an even or homogeneous pace. For example, while modernization<sup>23</sup> has spread out

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<sup>19</sup> Connolly, 33.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Modernization theory provided “an explanation of the global process by which traditional societies achieved modernity. (1) Political modernization involves the development of key institutions....which support participatory decision-making. (2) Cultural modernization typically produces secularization and adherence to national ideologies. (3) Economic modernization, while distinct from industrialization, is associated with profound economic changes – an increasing division of labour, use of management techniques, improved technology and the growth of commercial



beyond the West, secularization has been met with strong resistance in Islamic countries. Furthermore, the resurgence of religion and its inception as a force in the public sphere has given pause to both historians and theorists and has forced a reconsideration of the parallelism between the forces of modernity, modernity's alliance with secularism, and the assumed demise of religion in society and politics.

In the introduction to *Public Religions in The Modern World* (1994), Casanova writes that "religion in the 1980's 'went public' in a dual sense. It entered the 'public sphere' and gained, thereby, 'publicity.' Various 'publics' – the mass media, social scientists, professional politicians, and the public at large – suddenly began to pay attention to religion. The unexpected public interest derived from the fact that religion, leaving its assigned place in the private sphere, had thrust itself into the public arena of moral and political contestation."<sup>24</sup> Moreover, in his revised theory of secularization, Peter Berger summarizes the situation from which he and other theorists depart: "the world today, with some exceptions, is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever."<sup>25</sup> He concludes that, "the whole body of literature by historians and social scientists loosely labeled 'secularization theory' is essentially mistaken."<sup>26</sup> Thus, Berger calls for a revised theory that allows for a more ample understanding of religion and its relation to the public sphere. PCO can thus be analyzed through this lens that challenges the secularization thesis, as one could argue that it falls within the continuing trend of the

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facilities. (4) Social modernization involves increasing literacy, urbanization and the decline of traditional authority." See *Penguin Dictionary of Sociology*, s.v. "modernization."

<sup>24</sup> Casanova, 3.

<sup>25</sup> Berger, 2.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

reemergence of religiously motivated political action and activism that became clearly observable in the “religious new right”<sup>27</sup> movements of the 1980’s in the U.S.

The theorists and historians mentioned above offer a challenge to the generally accepted narrative of secularization as a forward moving force that begins with the onset of modernity in the West and spreads over the globe as science and technology mark the pace and direction of social history.<sup>28</sup> This challenge involves also a rethinking of the received understandings of the relationships of secularism to religion and especially to Christianity. For example, David Martin in *On Secularization: Towards a Revised General Theory* (2005) makes a case for establishing a different history of the rise of modernity and the concomitant dominance of secularization and secularism. In an earlier study<sup>29</sup> Martin shows that the dynamic of secularization in Anglo-Protestant cultures was very different from the dynamic in uniformly Catholic societies.<sup>30</sup> He establishes that the story of secularization is not a single, universal story, but rather a multiple story that varies locally in important ways. Martin’s studies show that the world is not moving in a single direction or at the same pace toward secularization. Thus, he argues that there is a need for the writing of an alternative narrative of secularization in the West. Perhaps it could be said that Taylor’s *A Secular Age* (2007) is an attempt to right just such an alternative narrative. In chapter nine of *On Secularization*, “Secularization: Master Narrative or Several Stories?” Martin deploys what Paul Ricoeur called the ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ – a tactic for questioning what

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<sup>27</sup> Richard John Neuhaus, in *The Naked Public Square* (1984), asserts that “the new right” emerged in the 1980’s rejected “the old right,” as represented by mid-century figures such as William Buckley, founder of the conservative magazine *National Review* and Russel Kirk, author of *The Conservative Mind*, and was represented by direct mail politics mogul Richard Viguerie, Phyllis Schlafly and Jesse Helms. He notes that “religious” is the modifier of “new right” and that the term “new religious right” is incorrect because “defined in terms of the cardinal points of fundamentalism, there has for almost a century been a religious right” and that “religiously speaking, the new religious right is not new.” See: Richard John Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1984).

<sup>28</sup> David Martin, *On Secularization: Toward a Revised General Theory* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), vii-ix.

<sup>29</sup> David Martin, *A General Theory of Secularization*, (London: Blackwell, 1978).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, ix.

has been taken for granted – to begin the deconstruction of the ‘standard model of secularization.’ One could say that Connolly, in *Why I Am Not a Secularist* (2001) and Taylor, in his recent massive alternative history of secularization, take up this call for the deconstruction of the standard model of secularization.

In establishing the terms for constructing this alternative narrative, Martin, Taylor, and Casanova question the received history of secularization<sup>31</sup> and its relation to modern Christianity. Casanova argues that religion has not in fact accepted the restricted conditions imposed on it by the forces of secularism that reserved the public square for reason alone. He argues that it is now important to take into account the fact that in the 1980’s “religion reversed one of the presuppositions of secularization theory by refusing to be privatized and marginalized. It emerged as a major actor in the public sphere and seemed able to articulate many of the concerns of civil society.”<sup>32</sup> Moreover, in Casanova’s view, “the Roman Catholic Church has accepted the liberal conception of the secular state, but rejects the privatization of religion,”<sup>33</sup> a position that PCO seems not only to share, but in fact departs from.

The complexity and reach of this debate is without a doubt beyond the objective of my thesis. However, some fundamental aspects of it are directly relevant to this case study, in which I advance the thesis that PCO has positioned itself at the edge between a separatist Catholic

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<sup>31</sup> “Any discussion of the theory of secularization, particularly any attempt to trace its genealogy and its history once it was incorporated into the social sciences, especially into sociology, where the theory eventually found its home, has to begin with the statement of a striking paradox. The theory of secularization may be the only theory which was able to attain a truly paradigmatic status within the modern social sciences. In one form or another, with the possible exception of Alexis de Tocqueville, Vilfredo Pareto, and William James, the thesis of secularization was shared by all the founding fathers: from Karl Marx to John Stuart Mill, from Auguste Comte to Herbert Spencer, from E.B. Tylor to James Frazer, from Ferdinand Toennies to Georg Simmel, from Emile Durkheim to Max Weber, from Wilhelm Wundt to Sigmund Freud, from Lester Ward to William G. Sumner, from Robert Park to George H. Mead. Indeed, the consensus was such that not only did the theory remain uncontested but apparently it was not even necessary to test it, since everybody took it for granted. This means that although the theory, or, rather, the thesis of secularization often served as the unstated premise of many of the founding fathers’ theories, it itself was never either rigorously examined or even formulated explicitly and systematically” See Casanova, 17.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, 24.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid, 24.

culture, that is still important and alive, and a political culture of the “common good” that seeks alliances and compromises with other political and cultural groups with whom they can share Catholic informed but not restrictive principles enunciated in Catholic Social Teaching.

For instance, the claim that secularism has become restrictive and reductive is of relevance to how PCO expected that they, as Catholics, could act in the public square. The emphasis is not on how, as citizens, they could participate in the political process, but rather about how, as Catholic citizens, with sources of morality that are different from secularist sources of morality, they could make an impact on the civic debates of the 2008 presidential election. The question remains whether PCO in fact made an impact from a Catholic perspective on the issues that they considered paramount to their “informed consciences”<sup>34</sup> or whether they were able to participate because they translated their religious views into the language of secularism, thus accepting the primacy and authority of secularist discourse. While some would argue that objections to this operation of translation represents the Vatican’s failure to understand the workings of a democracy, others would point to the fact that PCO seemed to be aware of this dilemma of having to choose between the language of secularism and the language of religion. As noted by George Weigel, in Berger’s compilation of essays on the desecularization of the world, Roman Catholicism is primarily a *religious* community which makes particular

truth claims about the human person, human community, human history, and human destiny, all understood in their relationship to God...At the same time, however, these truths about the human person and human community are truths with *public* consequences. In developing what we refer to as Catholic social doctrine, the teaching authority of the Church and the Church’s social ethicists have been drawing out those public consequences for more than a century now. Thus Roman Catholicism enters the new millennium as the bearer of richly textured, philosophically sophisticated and (if the term may be used neutrally of a

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<sup>34</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, “Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Responsibility from the Catholics Bishops of the United States” (Washington, D.C., 2007).

religious community) worldly wise set of ideas about how to create and sustain free societies and how to maintain an international public order in which freedom is at the service of peace and social justice.<sup>35</sup>

Further, he writes that this “assertion may surprise those who still think Catholicism is inextricably attached to pre-modernity.” With “the Second Vatican Council and the pontificate of John Paul II, Roman Catholicism has been fully inserted into the distinctively modern quest for meaning and value, for freedom, abundance, and social justice,” to which Weigel comments that Roman Catholicism has “learned a lot from modernity” and he asserts that now, “Roman Catholicism has important things to teach late modernity.”<sup>36</sup> In my historical research as well as in ethnographic interviews, I explore further the full dimensions of this dilemma regarding the question of religious-based or secularist-based political terminology and positioning, which the group faced. In the spirit of Pope John Paul II’s public pronouncements, PCO communicated that in advocating for Obama’s candidacy around a Catholic social justice matrix which highlighted the unjust Iraq war, the U.S.’s use of torture, the inequalities of the health care system, and other critical issues concerned with the question of justice, the group was making not univocal and particular Catholic claims but moral claims that they surmised could be engaged by every American, regardless of religious affiliation.

The recent work of the theorists mentioned earlier has generated a very active and strong debate, one which is directly relevant to the sociology of religion and questions of the relationship of religion to the public sphere. For example, in March 2009, The New School in New York City held a conference entitled, “The Religious/Secular Divide.” This conference featured presentations by Casanova, Connolly and Martin, as well as Noah Feldman, George Kateb, Charles Taylor, Susan F. Harding and James Davidson Hunter (to name a few). Another

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<sup>35</sup> Weigel, George. “Roman Catholicism in the Age of John Paul II” in *The Desecularization of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics*, ed. Peter Berger (Grand Rapids, MI: WB Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1999), 22.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 23.

indication of this topic's importance can be found on the Ford Foundation's website.<sup>37</sup> Recently, the Foundation has identified "Religion, Society and Culture" as one of the fields in which they find it necessary to invest in order to stimulate new research and new thinking on the question. What is interesting in the Foundation's choice is their understanding of the position and repositioning of religion in the public square. In their field overview for this topic, the Foundation states that: "Religious traditions are moral resources for contemporary societies. They shape social values and offer guidance in communities around the globe. Without taking a position on individual religions, we seek to discover, deepen and build upon these moral resources in pursuit of social justice, cultural pluralism, human rights and human dignity."<sup>38</sup> There would seem to be an uncanny coincidence between the questions that PCO pondered – moral sources in the pursuit of social justice, cultural pluralism and human dignity – and the questions identified by the Ford Foundation as areas that necessitate more thinking and analysis. Needless to say, these are similar to the concerns being debated in the literature cited above.

I further engage with the works of two ordained Catholic intellectuals, Richard John Neuhaus and David Hollenbach. In his book *The Naked Public Square* (1984), Neuhaus, a Roman Catholic priest and convert to the faith, argues that the "relatively new" idea that the public square should be "naked" (meaning free of religious thought and expression) is dogmatic and "exceedingly dangerous."<sup>39</sup> Although he does not name Habermas or cite his book, it would seem apparent that he is making references to Habermas's thesis on the boundaries between the public and the religious spheres. He asserts that "truth claims and normative ethics that have

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<sup>37</sup> The Foundation was established in 1936 by Edsel Ford, who gifted \$25,000 to the foundation to be used "for scientific, educational and charitable purposes, all for the public welfare." See Ford Foundation Website, <http://www.fordfound.org/about> (accessed February 2009).

<sup>38</sup> The Ford Foundation Website, "Religion, Society and Culture," <http://www.fordfound.org/fields/religionandculture/overview> (accessed February 2009).

<sup>39</sup> John Richard Neuhaus, *The Naked Public Square* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub Co., 1984), ix.

specific reference to God or religion have been, at least in theory, excluded” from the American public square. He identifies this position as “the ideology of secularism” and states that it “has distorted and threatens to discredit the American democratic experiment,”<sup>40</sup> asserting that “in sociological fact, the values of the American people are deeply rooted in religion”<sup>41</sup> and that “in everyday fact, people do not and cannot bifurcate themselves so at one moment they are thinking religiously and at another secularly, so to speak.”<sup>42</sup> Neuhaus points out that the country’s ethical foundations (“ultimacies”), publically articulated with specific reference to the Judeo-Christian religion, have only been recently excluded from the public sphere and notes that it is this exclusion that is being “vigorously protested by many Americans...[who] feel that they were not consulted by whoever decided that this is a secular society.”<sup>43</sup> Neuhaus served most recently as President George W. Bush’s adviser on “life issues” and was the sponsor of the Evangelicals and Catholics Together movement (which initially formed around the fight against abortion-rights). Given this association with the Bush administration, many observers of the political scene place Neuhaus with the American political right. However, Neuhaus himself characterizes his public persona as economically pragmatic, culturally conservative and “politically committed to the vital center of liberal democracy.”<sup>44</sup> What is of interest here for my discussion of PCO is Neuhaus’s early challenge (1984) to the boundaries set by the conception of the public sphere as one in which religion has no place. Neuhaus contests the boundary placed between religion and reason in the public sphere as it produces, amongst other problems, “bifurcated” subjects who will, by definition, always find themselves in a dilemma. In this sense, Neuhaus is not far from

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, 23.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 25.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 28.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, ix.

Casanova's contention that religion has been "deprivatized" and in fact, can and does enter the sphere of civil society.<sup>45</sup> Further, in order to have a better understanding of what is happening, one must contest the assumptions that have erected these boundaries in the first place.<sup>46</sup> While the thrust of Neuhaus's book is directed toward the ethical foundations of the law, Jesuit scholar David Hollenbach departs from the fact of pluralism in the world, in order to constitute the common good.

Hollenbach's 2002 book entitled *The Common Good and Christian Ethics*, posits that the current social and cultural situation, which, due to globalization involves pluralistic interaction at almost every level of life, calls for a reassessment of the now conventional idea of tolerance and "peaceful coexistence." Acting and engaging with one's fellow humans, now more than ever, Hollenbach contends, requires a revitalization of the Christian notion of the "common good," in which Christians and non-Christians engage in mutual listening and speaking in order to work toward a shared vision of the good life.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, in his book *American Religious Democracy* (2007), Bruce Ledewitz's analysis of the 2004 election resonates in this debate in as much as he argues that the completion of a process that began in the 1980's with the appearance of "public religions" (in Casanova's language), would seem now to have been completed. To the surprise of many today, he contends that "on November 3, 2004, with the reelection of President George W. Bush, the American people finally decided that government should, and would, endorse religion" (xii). Although Ledewitz provides ample evidence of Bush's religious rhetoric and evangelical identity, and his

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<sup>45</sup> Casanova, 65.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 65.

<sup>47</sup> Hollenbach, 137.



claim is interesting to this debate, there are probably few who would accept his thesis. His thesis, however, offers more proof that scholars are actively engaging with this issue.

To bring further critical context to my analysis of PCO and to situate the phenomenon within the larger historical spectrum of American Catholicism, I engage recent literature that focuses on the history of the political participation of American Catholics in the public square since the Second Vatican Council. These works include but are not limited to the following works in the field of political science: Kristin Heyer's (et al.) *Catholics and Politics: The Dynamic Tension Between Faith and Power* (2008), Mark Massa's *Catholics and American Culture* (1999), William Prendergast's *The Catholic Voter in American Politics* (2007), and Margaret O'Brian Steinfeld's *American Catholics and Civic Engagement: A Distinctive Voice* (2004). I also refer to Charles Morris' historical narrative of Catholic presence in the United States, *American Catholic* (1998) and chapter ten of Garry Wills' 2007 book, *Head and Heart: American Christianities*, entitled "The Karl Rove Era," which addresses then Deputy Chief of Staff Karl Rove's fierce campaign to harness the Catholic vote for President George W. Bush in the 2000 and 2004 elections through manipulating the issue of abortion.

Kristin Heyer's book (2008), a compilation of essays on the interaction of Catholics with the political realm in the U.S., is broken down into four parts, "Catholic Leaders in U.S. Politics," "The Catholic Public," Catholics and the Federal Government," and International Policy and the Vatican." It covers many relevant topics such as the U.S. bishops and the centrality of abortion, how faith informs Catholic voters and politicians, the dual imperative of promoting life and social justice, and Catholics' relation to the "culture wars." This discussion provides a good context for understanding PCO's dilemma.

Thomas Massa's *Catholics and American Culture* (1999) traces the evolution of American Catholics' relationship to American culture beginning with nineteenth century Protestant fears of Catholic authoritarianism, progressing to the post-WWII emergence of a powerful "Americanist" patriotism among Catholics, the rise of Fulton Sheen<sup>48</sup> and the mainstreaming of Catholic culture, the meaning of Kennedy's election for Catholics and for the broader American culture, and the socio-economic mobility experienced by Catholics in the latter half of the century. Coupled with Morris' survey on the history of Catholics in the U.S., *American Catholic*, Massa's book provides a broad historical understanding of the shifting locations and positions of American Catholics with a focus on the twentieth century, and more specifically the post-WWII period.

Shifting the focus from the broader cultural history of American Catholics to a strict focus on the political realm, William Prendergast's *The Catholic Voter in American Politics: The Passing of the Democratic Monolith* discusses the patterns and changes of Catholic voters throughout American history. Although Prendergast discusses the entire gamut of Catholic political participation in the U.S., I concentrate on his chapters on the post-war period, beginning with Kennedy's election in 1960. Prendergast's writing on this period is broken down into the following topics, "Kennedy and the Return of the Prodigals," "Catholics in the Turbulent Sixties and Seventies," "The Political Homogenization of American Catholics," and "The Catholic Voter: Summarizing Conclusions." Prendergast's discussion of the changes in Catholic voter patterns over the latter part of the century will serve to place PCO within a wider context of Catholic political action and participation in the U.S. As Prendergast's title indicates, the

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<sup>48</sup> Fulton Sheen was an American Catholic Bishop whose prime time radio and television program, *The Catholic Hour*, was broadcast for twenty years (1930-1950). He later hosted a show called *Life is Worth Living*, which ran from 1951 to 1957. His broadcasts reached millions of Americans on a weekly basis.

Democratic monolith that once characterized the Catholic vote has passed and the current unpredictability of the Catholic voter relates directly to phenomenon of PCO.

Along with the secondary sources I have mentioned, I engage directly with the primary sources available on Catholic support for Obama, such as articles in the Catholic and secular press, statements of support from prominent Catholics, and Catholics for Obama campaign literature. One critical example of such literature is Douglas Kmiec's book, *Can A Catholic Support Him? Asking The Big Question About Barack Obama*, which was published in September 2008. In his book Kmiec, a Professor of Constitutional Law at Pepperdine University's School of Law, former head of the Office of Legal Counsel for Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, and an outspoken Catholic intellectual, sought to address the questions that arose from his decision to support a candidate who supported abortion rights: "Can a Catholic support a "pro-choice" candidate? Can there be a reverence for life that embraces a larger set of values? How does a Catholic citizen balance his obligations to the Church and to community?"<sup>49</sup> In a step-by-step deconstruction of the arguments that support the "single issue voting" pattern among twenty-first century Catholics (voting strictly according to a candidate's "pro-life" or "pro-choice" position), Kmiec uses Catholic moral reasoning to argue that "Catholic voters are not morally precluded from voting for a candidate who does not happen to share the belief that *Roe v. Wade* should be reversed."<sup>50</sup> Kmiec argues that while it is true that Obama does not support the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, he favors a different and "better" way of reducing the number of abortions by improving pre-natal, maternity and adoption resources and "to better educate un-marrieds about the serious side of sexual intimacy."<sup>51</sup> In addition to

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<sup>49</sup> Douglas W. Kmiec, *Can A Catholic Support Him? Asking the Big Question About Barack Obama* (New York, NY: Overlook Press, 2008).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 29.

addressing the powerful abortion issue, Kmiec argues that on other issues important to the Catholic voter, such as the Iraq war, torture, health care, workers rights and many other issues, Obama's positions are seemingly in line with Catholic social teaching.

## **1.2. THE PROBLEM: ARRIVING AT THE "PROPER" MORAL CHOICE**

In order to set up my discussion of the dilemmas that PCO faced, I borrow the image of "cross pressures" from Charles Taylor's *A Secular Age* (2007).<sup>52</sup> This term is grounded in a historical analysis of how subjects whose ethical sources stem from a religious matrix feel pressured by the discursive forces of secularism.<sup>53</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, these cross pressures or dilemmas are best illustrated by the issue of abortion. The Roman Catholic Church has concluded that this issue is of primary moral importance because it is fundamental to the question of human dignity. Many leading Catholics in the U.S. maintain that the only way to eliminate the practice of abortions in the U.S. is to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, the 1973 Supreme Court decision that legalized the practice of abortion. One of the most important problems and dilemmas for Pittsburgh Catholics for Obama was that it had to face this uncompromising position on the part of many lay Catholics and Bishops. As a result, members of PCO were constantly having to defend their support for Obama, a candidate in favor of abortion rights, to their Catholic peers who found this support unacceptable not only for Catholics, but for anyone who believes in human rights and human dignity. This issue forced PCO and many other

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<sup>52</sup> Neo-Marxist language would express this by calling PCO subject, "overdetermined."

<sup>53</sup> Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2007), 594-617.

progressive Catholic groups to create a well-reasoned case, based in Catholic teaching, for supporting Obama despite the fact that he is “pro-choice.”

Along with other progressive Catholic organizations that stressed Catholic teachings on social justice, PCO devised a strategy that allowed them to switch the emphasis from the correctness of their ethical position on abortion to finding a path within the existing political milieu that would allow them to get closer to their objectives. They argued that while the Republican Party has consistently run on a “pro-life” platform, it has done next to nothing in the past thirty-five years to indicate a serious interest in ensuring the overturning of the 1973 decision. In mounting this more restricted political argument, PCO also pointed out the fact that even if *Roe v. Wade* were overturned, abortion rights would not be eliminated. Rather, the decision would just be transferred back to the states.

Obama’s unique opening to a search for common ground with religious groups stated in his 2006 book, *The Audacity of Hope*, both increased the opportunities for and the pressures on Catholic citizens to enter into a dialogue with his platform. Seeking the votes of religious Americans who found his position on abortion out of line with their overall moral beliefs regarding questions of life and death, Obama actively addressed the issue during the campaign in the hope of finding common ground solutions to reducing the number of abortions performed in the U.S. For example, the Pro-Life-Pro-Obama website created by the Matthew 25 Network, an organization of Christians calling for a new type of political engagement, states that “an Obama administration will do more than a McCain administration for the cause of life, by drastically reducing abortions through giving women and families the support and the tools they need to

choose life.”<sup>54</sup> For many participants in PCO, this argument and the promising enactment of its measures provided the best practical solution to the issue.

There is little doubt that PCO members felt conflicted during the election campaign. However, the perception of some of the participants in PCO was that Obama addressed and personified a discourse that sought to transcend the cleavage between the secular and “religious” spheres and emphasized instead their common ground. It will be of interest to determine in my research whether these perceptions, as well as other possibilities for the reconfiguration of the public sphere, were indeed part of what PCO was in search of, tried to articulate, and/or succeeded in putting in place in the body politic. Further, in considering the dilemmas faced by PCO, I inquire into whether this space of discussion and action carved out of the general political milieu constitutes anything like the “ethos of critical engagement” that Connolly calls for.

As stated earlier, my study on PCO is a small but important piece in the generalized challenge to secularism that is current in the field of political theory and religious studies, and the phenomenon of “public religion” as posited by Casanova. Further, it is significant within the larger question of the relations of religious discourse to the public sphere in recent American history. My thesis offers a ground for assessing whether the political participation of PCO constitutes a point of departure for a new conception of religion’s place in American politics and especially in the relationship between American Catholics and the Democratic Party. The problem of having a common source of ethics for Catholics remains central to the dilemma posed to Catholics by certain forces of secularism and pluralism. In this regard, it is important to review carefully the sources for the thesis of the common good used by Korzen and Kelley –

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<sup>54</sup> Mathew 25 Network Website, “Pro Life Pro Obama: What Barack Obama Will Do,” [http://www.prolifeproobama.com/plpo\\_willdo.htm](http://www.prolifeproobama.com/plpo_willdo.htm) (accessed December 2008).

turning religious beliefs into social values.<sup>55</sup> Although my thesis does not address this problem principally, in future research it would be of great interest to find out whether Obama's opening to religious voices in his campaign has successfully fostered the construction of a new space for debate, cooperation, and alternatives.

This thesis consists of three chapters, which approach the subject matter of PCO from different points of inquiry. The first chapter addresses PCO from the theoretical problems addressed in the literature review. The second provides a historical framework for understanding PCO's location within recent American history. The third chapter offers an ethnographic analysis of PCO, focusing on three prominent members.

## **Chapter 1. Religion, Secularism, and the Cross Pressured Subject**

The first chapter deals with the dilemmas and cross pressures involved in the operation of a political group informed by religious beliefs within a secular political system. In order to preface my incorporation of ethnographic data into an analysis informed by the theorists mentioned earlier, I will outline the relevant arguments posed by Casanova, Connolly, Taylor and others.

## **Chapter 2. A Short History of Catholic Political and Cultural Presence in the United States**

In this chapter, in order to properly contextualize the dilemmas and cross pressures that PCO had to negotiate, I focus on specific moments in twentieth century American history when Catholics had to negotiate their allegiance to the universal claims of the Roman Catholic Church and their patriotism in a modernizing America. Casanova argues that in the face of these dilemmas, "Catholics...learned to compartmentalize rigidly two spheres of life, the religious and

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<sup>55</sup> Korzen and Kelley, 50.

the secular. Catholicism was restricted to the religious sphere, while Americanism was restricted to the secular sphere. American Catholics were Roman Catholics in church and ethnic Catholic Americans in the world.”<sup>56</sup> Paula Kane, in her book, *Separatism and Subculture* (1994), describes and analyzes the dilemma of Catholic separatism in early twentieth century Boston. She writes that the papal censure of modernism in 1907 resulted in the perpetuation of a separate Catholic subculture which sought to distinguish itself from the secular culture of American life.<sup>57</sup>

As I move through the latter part of the twentieth century I identify and focus on other key moments when Catholics were confronted with difficult choices and dilemmas regarding their position within American society. I then focus on key shifts in Catholic political positions, beginning with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980. Throughout this discussion I remain mindful of how these dilemmas speak to the issues of the dialectics of secularization and secularism. From this historical overview, I then shift the focus to my case study.

### **Chapter 3. The Story and Positions of Pittsburgh Catholics for Obama**

Obviously, telling the story of PCO’s organization is critical to understanding the group and its dilemmas. In this chapter I will discuss the creation and development of the group and identify its positions and main arguments. I will further bring out the personal positions and stories of my three main informants. This ethnographic narrative will show how PCO came together to form an activist group in which being a Catholic figured prominently in the group’s identity. In this narrative I hope to assess the degree of integration into the political process that each PCO member felt in regards to their Catholic identity.

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<sup>56</sup> Casanova, 181.

<sup>57</sup> Kane, 9.



## **Conclusions: Forging a New Space For Debate**

This final section in my thesis will address whether one can consider PCO to be a new space for the kind of debate that Jesuit scholar David Hollenbach calls for. To what extent and in which ways does Obama's inclusion of religious voices into his campaign provide an example of Hollenbach or Connolly's kind of political engagement? How do Obama's positions on including religious voices into his campaign and the wider political debate fit into the larger debate on secularism? This concluding section will further assess and analyze the assembled ethnographic data on PCO in terms of Hollenbach and Connolly's call for a new space for debate which allows religious groups to participate in the political sphere in ways that do not force them to translate the political conclusions they have reached based on their religious belief system into strictly secular language. In addition, I show how PCO fits into the rich tradition of Catholic activism and discuss the link between Obama's professional beginnings and Catholic social justice, a connection that further accounts for both Catholic support of the candidate and the candidate's professed desire to work for the common good.

## **2.0 RELIGION, SECULARISM, AND THE CROSS PRESSURED SUBJECT**

### **2.1 THE RESURGENCE OF RELIGION IN THE PUBLIC SQUARE (1980- )**

Pittsburgh Catholics for Obama is an example of citizens whose ethical convictions and therefore political convictions are based on a Catholic matrix. By attending PCO meetings, group members demonstrated their desire to participate in the public square as Catholics and not simply as Democrats or Republicans. This desire to engage in the election debate as religiously informed citizens addresses both directly and indirectly the debates on secularism and its relationship to religion.<sup>58</sup> The following is a discussion of some of the central ideas in the current debate on secularism and its relation to religion, together with an investigation as to how this debate bears on a possible analysis of PCO.<sup>59</sup>

In his book, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (1994), José Casanova asserts that in the 1980's, religion "went public in a dual sense," that is to say that religion set foot in the public sphere and thereby garnered publicity.<sup>60</sup> Casanova's main claims challenge Max Weber's prominent theory of secularization, which holds that as modernity progresses, religion will, of necessity, become so confined to the realm of the private that it will eventually become

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<sup>58</sup> Secularism holds that as modernity progresses and religion is forced into the private realm, religion will eventually disappear.

<sup>59</sup> This chapter is, by no means, an effort to give a full account of all the issues involved.

<sup>60</sup> Casanova, 3.

unnecessary and irrelevant.<sup>61</sup> Bruce Ledewitz, in *American Religious Democracy: Coming to Terms with the End of Secular Politics* (2007), offers a succinct presentation of the secularization thesis. “The secularization thesis may be more simply stated as asserting that religion declines with modernization,” writes Ledewitz. “That belief was the first and foundational element of what we may call the ‘American Secular Consensus. It was a claim about history, more specifically about the inevitable movement of history away from religion.”<sup>62</sup>

Citing four seemingly unrelated world events that took place in the 1980’s that surprised, overcame, and questioned secularization theory, Casanova contends that a reassessment of the place of religion in the modern world must be undertaken. The first event he identifies is the 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran. It is important to remember here that this political revolution grew out of Islamic religious and political thinking, rather than a secularist ideology such as Marxism. The second event is the rise of the solidarity movement in Poland, in which workers, united around a Catholic religious matrix, contributed to the eventual overturning of Poland’s Communist state.<sup>63</sup> The third unexpected phenomenon Casanova cites is the role of Catholicism in the Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua. Last, he points to the public re-emergence of Protestant fundamentalism as a force in American politics. Taken all together these four revolutionary events constitute the historical evidence for the resurgence of religion in world politics. In these specific historical events, as well as in others that Casanova includes within his brief historical review of recent religiously based action, Casanova demonstrates that religious

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<sup>61</sup> Charles Taylor, in *A Secular Age* (2007), asserts that the foundation of secularism “is the assumption that the world is proceeding toward an overcoming or relegation of religion” (594). Further, Taylor points out that this master narrative, in a circular way, “enframes the particular theoretical claims which constitute the theory.” See Taylor, 594.

<sup>62</sup> Bruce Ledewitz, *American Religious Democracy* (London: Praeger, 2007), 13.

<sup>63</sup> According to an Associated Press article in *USA Today*, Lech Walesa, the movement’s leader, credited Pope John Paul II with “inspiring the birth of the movement with his historic 1979 visit to his homeland, during which he celebrated Masses that electrified the nation and subtly criticized the communist regime.” See “Poland’s Solidarity Movement Marks 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary,” August 31, 2005, *USA Today* online.

beliefs activism were becoming increasingly involved in public affairs with the clear objective of making fundamental and revolutionary changes in society. Casanova's main thesis thus states that, "we are witnessing the 'deprivatization' of religion in the modern world."<sup>64</sup> Religion is not, therefore, the fixed phenomenon which secularist theory made it out to be. Further, these traditional religions (Islam and Christianity) contain ethical matrixes that are already political in nature. Thus because they contain a political core, these old religions will intervene in political matters. Hence the central thesis of secularization in both historical and theoretical terms is incorrect; this is also so because the thesis avoids or ignores the fundamental ethical aspect of these world religions.

Casanova uses the term "public religions" in order to narrow his discussion of religious resurgence in the latter quarter of the twentieth century. He insists on distinguishing between recent "religious" phenomena such as the growth of cults and "New Age" spirituality, and "public" religion. The former phenomena, he writes, fit within the established narrative and expectations of secularization theory and can be categorized as belonging to the realm of the "private." They can be classified into the grouping identified by Thomas Luckmann as "invisible" religion. As such they do not dispute or disrupt either "the dominant structures or the dominant paradigms."<sup>65</sup> While these types of religious developments are notable in their novelty within the categories of "religious experimentation" and "new religious movements," they fall outside the pattern of traditional religions revitalizing and asserting a more public role in the making of history. The distinction between "private" and "public" religions drawn by Casanova is relevant and useful to our understanding of the phenomenon of Pittsburgh Catholics for Obama, which certainly must be analyzed within the historical resurgence of traditional religion,

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<sup>64</sup> Casanova, 5.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

such as Catholicism, into the public square. Here Casanova confirms Mary Douglas, who in 1982 wrote that, “no one credited the traditional religions with enough vitality to inspire large-scale political revolt.”<sup>66</sup> Thus we can see the relevance of this argument, concerning the ethical core of traditional religions and the desire of their members to participate in the political debates ensuing in the public sphere, to the desired agency of PCO members.

## **2.2. THE 2004 U.S. ELECTIONS AND THE NEW “RELIGIOUS DEMOCRACY”**

The most significant aspect of the resurgence of “public” religions, according to Casanova, is their refusal to accept the marginal and privatized role assigned to them by modernization and secularization narratives.<sup>67</sup> As a result, two clear lessons can be drawn from the resurgence of religion in the 1980’s according to Casanova. The first is that “religions are here to stay, thus putting to rest one of the cherished dreams of the Enlightenment.”<sup>68</sup> The second, and arguably more important lesson, is that religions will continue play a greater and more important role in the building of the modern world.<sup>69</sup> It is from this second lesson that Casanova concludes that better theories are needed for understanding the “changing boundaries” between the “public” and “private” spheres and how religion creates and negotiates these shifting boundaries.<sup>70</sup> Writing more than a decade after Casanova’s book, Ledewitz seems to take Casanova’s thesis for granted concerning the resurgence of public religions and takes it much

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 6.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 7.

further. He argues that the wall of separation between church and state has collapsed, specifically after the electoral results of 2004 U.S. presidential election. Indeed, for Ledewitz, the separation between “private” religion and the public sphere was but a secularist dream in which public life could be conducted “without religious language and symbolism.”<sup>71</sup> Some observers might suggest that Ledewitz’s thesis is colored with conservative ideology from the start. Nevertheless, it needs to be considered in this discussion.

Because of its timeliness and focus on religiously based political participation in the U.S., Ledewitz’s thesis directly relates to the phenomenon of PCO. He asserts that American secularism collapsed in 2004 – that public life in the U.S. changed at that moment, “in favor of religion.”<sup>72</sup> Citing a statement by David Brooks, a conservative columnist for *The New York Times*, as evidentiary support, Ledewitz posits that in 2004 secularism collapsed “as a consensus.”<sup>73</sup> “Like a lot of people these days, I am a recovering secularist,” Brooks stated. “Until September 11, 2001, I accepted the notion that as the world becomes richer and better educated, it becomes less religious.”<sup>74</sup> According to Ledewitz, religion has made a political and cultural breakthrough in the past few years that would have been difficult to foresee during the mid-twentieth century.<sup>75</sup> He goes so far as to assign the term “religious democracy” to the U.S.’s current political system and sustains the validity of this idea by pointing to two key empirical factors. The first is the substantial number of voters in America who vote according to what they

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<sup>71</sup> Ledewitz further points out that “government was to be neutral with regard to religion and not to promote or endorse it. Religion was to be relegated to the personal and, thus, private life. There it would eventually dissipate. This secular dream emerged, as Noah Feldman shows in his book, *Divided by God* (2005), after World War II and succeeded as accepted constitutional doctrine in an astonishingly short time. By the 1960’s and more or less since then, this form of separation of Church and State has been enforced by the Supreme Court to greater and lesser extents. It was this dream of true separation of religion and public life that was repudiated in the 2004 presidential election.” See Ledewitz, 14.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid, xiii.

consider to be religious reasons. The second aspect of the term focuses on how the participation of these voters has effectively altered governmental policy to “reflect their religious commitments.”<sup>76</sup> “In other words,” writes Ledewitz, “George Bush might just as well have said out loud during the 2004 campaign, ‘Vote for me because I am a Christian and I will carry out policies that you and I believe are consistent with the Christian faith.’”<sup>77</sup> Ledewitz anticipates his critics’ response to his assertion by writing that “Of course, voters vote for religious reasons, as for other reasons, and of course, government policy changes as a result of their preferences.”<sup>78</sup> But, he counters, this response is not in line with the perceived understanding of a secular democracy, whose main tenet “was the denial that government could endorse religion.”<sup>79</sup>

From the perspective of the politics of 2004, it seemed that the Republican Party had developed an undisputed lock on the Christian vote. “Religious democracy,” Ledewitz writes (pre-2008), “is not confined to the Republican Party, but it is centered there.”<sup>80</sup> For some readers, Ledewitz’s claim that, “liberals don’t accept religion in public life,”<sup>81</sup> would seem not only an exaggeration, but indeed an ideological position in itself. Further, Bush, many would argue including those in PCO, did not in fact push policies that are consistent with the Christian faith. This failure, coupled with Barack Obama’s affirmation of religiously informed civic participation, set the groundwork for an opening within the Democratic party to court religious voters in somewhat unprecedented ways during the 2008 presidential election. The overt participation of citizens from both political parties speaking from their religious convictions in the political arena would seem to underscore both Casanova and Ledewitz’s theses about the

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, xiv.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

forceful emergence of “public” religions into the public square. PCO offers a telling example of the dilemmas and vicissitudes faced by citizens who wish to intervene in the political arena informed by the ethical matrix of their religion. This is so despite the fact that scholars have registered and pointed to the collapse of the wall between Church and State. Ledewitz, who speaks of this collapse, has not dwelled upon the detail and the complexities that this phenomenon entails.

### 2.3 “REFASHIONING THE SECULAR”

Coming from the perspective of political theory, William Connolly in *Why I am Not a Secularist* (1999), poses yet another critical review of secularism’s desire to draw a steadfast line between itself and religious thinking in the public square. In his introduction entitled “Refashioning the Secular,” Connolly first identifies himself as an atheist and later as a theorist who is not in the least interested in bringing back the authority of the convictions of Christianity at the center of public discourse.<sup>82</sup> He assures his secular reader that “I oppose a religiously centered politics.”<sup>83</sup> Having cleared the ground as to his position in the struggle between the forces of secularization and those who would reposition religion at the center of the public square, Connolly goes on to describe his own proposal, which he terms an “ethos of engagement.”<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Connolly, 5-6.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid, 5.



Connolly decries “the secular wish to contain religious and irreligious passions within private life” because it has helped to “engender the immodest conceptions of public life peddled by so many secularists.”<sup>85</sup> In order to escape this narrow and reductive space of secularism, Connolly argues that what is needed today is a public ethos of engagement in which “a wider variety of perspectives than heretofore acknowledged inform and restrain one another.”<sup>86</sup> Thus his proposal does not entail the rejection of secularism and an indiscriminant wide opening to religious discourses into the public sphere. Instead he wishes to “refashion secularism” so that it “might help to temper or disperse religious intolerance while honoring the desire of a variety of believers and nonbelievers to represent their faiths in public life.”<sup>87</sup> He goes on to state that such a project would “help to render public life more pluralistic in shape and more responsive to the politics of becoming.”<sup>88</sup> By the “politics of becoming” Connolly means “that conflictual process by which new identities are propelled into being by moving the preexisting shape of diversity, justice and legitimacy.”<sup>89</sup>

The proposal for an “ethos of engagement” in which a variety of perspectives “inform and restrain” one another, not necessarily in order to achieve agreement, is a position from which we can interrogate PCO and analyze the nature and results of their engagement of Obama’s position on a number of issues in relation to their positions on the same issues from a Catholic perspective. Did the position of PCO, on issues such as abortion, the Iraq war, and the use of torture by the U.S. government, restrain or effect in any way Obama’s policies after the election? A telling case is Obama’s selection of Governor Kathleen Sebelius for Secretary of Health and

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 10.

Human Services, whose position on abortion itself has unleashed yet again, the divisiveness of the abortion issue. The scope of this paper cannot provide answers to this question, but it can point to this example of Sebelius' appointment for future inquiry.

Despite the fact that he continues to assert his conviction that “secularism needs refashioning, not elimination,”<sup>90</sup> in chapter one, entitled “The Conceits of Secularism,” Connolly levels a devastating critique of secularism for suppressing and reducing key dimensions of life. Amongst other critiques leveled against secularism's arrogance and deprecation of ways of knowledge not necessarily tied to the discourse of reason, Connolly writes that “secularism lacks the ability to come to terms with the sources of morality most citizens endorse: therefore secularism itself drifts toward public orientations that challenge the moral sensibilities of many of its citizens.”<sup>91</sup> Besides offering a sharp critique of secularism's failure to offer clarity as to the separation of public and private space, Connolly is consistently disturbed by the idea that secularism fails to offer sufficient grounds for ethical and political thinking. Connolly offers the idea of the “ethos of engagement,” in which partisan subjects, religious or nonreligious, engage with one another in public discourse not necessarily to find common ground, but to acknowledge their differences with respect. In this proposal, religion is not longer relegated to the realm of the “private” or the “invisible, or silenced by the reason of secularism as science and other disciplinary knowledges. To what extent was PCO bringing its beliefs out into the public sphere and engaging in public discourse? To what extent does PCO's engagement reinforce exclusionist secularism or to what extent does it gain ground for religious discourse within an exclusionist secularism?

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, 23.

In *The Common Good and Christian Ethics* (2002), David Hollenbach, S.J., develops a proposal for the voicing and participation of Christian ethics in a community of freedom. In his search for a space of engagement in the public sphere, in which religiously based ideas of the just and the “proper” moral choices can be heard and entered into serious discussion with a plurality of other perspectives, Hollenbach speaks of the modalities of intellectual engagement that can lead citizens of our global age in the search for intellectual solidarity, which he defines as

an intellectual endeavor” that “calls for serious thinking by citizens about what their distinctive understanding for the good imply for the life of a society made up of people with many different traditions. “It is a form of solidarity, because it can only occur in an active dialogue of mutual listening and speaking across the boundaries of religion and culture.”<sup>92</sup>

He offers a proposal that speaks to Connolly’s “ethos of engagement” from a Catholic perspective. Hollenbach’s proposal will be discussed later in relation to PCO.

## **2.4 THE CROSS PRESSURED SUBJECT**

For Taylor, humanism forces religious discourse to explain itself in secular terms. Therefore the construction of an ethics based on secular values and without reference to a transcendent point will always fall short of the mark and underlines the condition of the cross pressured subject.

The salient feature of Western societies is not so much a decline of religious faith and practice, though there has been lots of that, more in some societies than in others, but rather a mutual fragilization of different religious positions, as well as of the outlooks both of belief and unbelief. The whole culture experiences cross

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<sup>92</sup> Hollenbach, 137.

pressures between the draw of the narratives of closed imminence<sup>93</sup> on one side, and the sense of their inadequacy on the other, strengthened by encounter with existing milieu of religious practice or just by some intimations of the transcendent. The cross pressures are experienced more acutely by some people and in some milieu than others, but over the whole culture, we can see them reflected in a number of middle positions, which have drawn from both sides.<sup>94</sup>

Although convoluted in his style, Taylor's concept of a cross pressured culture, which yields a number of "middle" and fragile "positions" drawn from both sides, seems to describe the dilemma and conflict faced by PCO, who on the one hand want their faith-based values to be represented in the public square while at the same time, finding a basis for common ground with those who do not share the Catholic ethical matrix but have similar objectives in mind. Taylor's sense of the cross pressured culture would allow for establishing a connection between the complexity of the phenomenon of PCO and the generalized revision of the relationship of the forces of secularization and religious search for a space in the public square that Casanova, Ledewitz, Connolly and Taylor, amongst others have been analyzing.

In Taylor's argument, the key question of our cross pressured culture is the ethical predicament in as much as he argues that what he calls reductive materialism cannot explain nor provide for *agape*.<sup>95</sup> Instead, reductive materialism promotes a "morality of mutual benefit,"<sup>96</sup> in which a dynamic of self-benefit governs man's relationship with his others. For Taylor, in contrast with a morality of mutual benefit, which he rejects, the Christian *agape* provides both "path and destination."<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> For Taylor, one of the chief narratives of what he calls closed imminence is "science-based materialism" which downplays cultural change and invention. "Materialism is too closely bound up with reductionist views, in which thought, intentions, desires and aspirations are suppose to be reductively explained either in terms of mechanisms, or in terms of more basic motivations." See Taylor, 595.

<sup>94</sup> Taylor, 596.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 604.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 596.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 604.

In Taylor's analysis of the morality of mutual benefit, we can anticipate the dilemma currently faced by Kansas Governor Kathleen Sebelius as a Catholic politician. Her dilemma regarding the issue of abortion has now become critical to her appointment to the position of Secretary of Health and Human Services as it was recently discovered that she misrepresented the figures of contribution donations from a controversial late-term abortion doctor practicing in Kansas and vetoed a number of bills containing measures to curb late-term abortions while serving as Governor.<sup>98</sup> Following the model established in the 1960's by John F. Kennedy of the privatization of religion and the promotion of an interaction of mutual benefit between the polity and politicians, Sebelius' position on abortion now seems insufficient to assuage the fears and suspicions of those who believe that one enforce a law that contradicts one's fundamental beliefs about human life.

In response to the challenges to his candidacy based on fears that his Catholic faith would produce "divided loyalties" (loyalties to the U.S. and to the dictates of the Catholic Church hierarchy), Kennedy consistently verbalized an insistence that faith was solely an aspect of a person's private affairs, not for him to impose on the public nor for the public or the nation to impose upon him. In a September 12, 1960 speech he delivered in Houston, Texas, Kennedy stated that he believed that the separation of church and state in the United States was "absolute" and that the presidency ought not to be made into an instrument of any religious group.<sup>99</sup> In his book, *Catholics and American Culture* (1999), Mark Massa writes that this speech "adumbrated a 'wall of separation' between religion and public service that went considerably beyond what might be termed the allaying of bigoted fears."<sup>100</sup> Further, Massa claims that Kennedy's

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<sup>98</sup> Reid Wilson, "Sebelius to face questions over abortion," *The Hill*, March 1, 2009.

<sup>99</sup> Massa, 141.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 142.

“theology” provides the framework for the relationship between “private” belief and “public” action that mark what “social scientists and scholars of religion have termed the ‘privatization of religion.’”<sup>101</sup> Later in the speech Kennedy aligns his position on religion with those of the founding fathers of American democracy by stating that it was specifically this kind of religious freedom for which “our forefathers (died) when they fled here to escape religious test oaths that denied office to members of less favored churches.”<sup>102</sup>

Massa then points to an article by Winthrop Hudson in the *Christian Century*, which notes that after the Houston speech, Nixon began to express the same opinion on faith matters as Kennedy. Hudson wrote that Kennedy and Nixon seem to hold the “general conviction that religion is a good thing but nonetheless a purely private affair which has few implications for the political order.”<sup>103</sup> The use of this quote indicates the immediate effects of the Houston speech within the American political arena and, for Massa, demonstrates the beginning of what he calls the “secularization of the presidency.”<sup>104</sup> “Kennedy’s *Realpolitik* reading of the political and social situation in the fall of 1960 mandated an almost total privatization of his Catholic faith – a privatization that was politically expedient, however theologically problematic it might be,” writes Massa.<sup>105</sup>

During the last thirty years, Kennedy’s interpretation of a clear separation of religion from the state, to a large extent, been adopted by many on the American Left. Korzen and Kelley, whose recent book<sup>106</sup> was referenced and praised by many PCO members, note that “scarcely a year goes by without someone, somewhere, challenging a local government’s right to

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 143.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 142.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 144.

<sup>106</sup> Chris Korzen and Alexia Kelley, *A Nation For All: How the Catholic Vision of the Common Good Can Save America From the Politics of Division* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008).

fund a holiday display” and that we often hear about lawsuits against public school districts for permitting voluntary prayer at school gatherings. Progressives, they write, have done a sufficient job of alienating “people of faith.” Further, they contend, “all this has left a lot of people of faith feeling looked down upon by members of the ‘secular left,’ many of whom treat churchgoers as dinosaurs who just need to get with the times.”<sup>107</sup> At the same time, Korzen and Kelley, like PCO, express frustration with conservatives who have used the Christian religion to justify the invasion of Iraq and to support claims that the U.S.’s involvement in the Middle East “somehow fulfills God’s will.”<sup>108</sup> Both sides, they write, take their positions to “unhealthy extremes.” It is from this environment of “unhealthy extremes” that PCO and the national Catholics for Obama campaign emerged as a popular and powerful alternative for politically mindful Catholics, demonstrating that “folks want a political dialogue that’s rooted in values, including religious values,”<sup>109</sup> and that there is no reason why the Right should have a monopoly on the Christian vote.

In his analysis of the Catholic vote in the U.S., E.J. Dionne contends that there is no Catholic vote. His conclusion is in part based on the idea that “Catholics are the ultimate cross pressured group.”<sup>110</sup> For example, he writes, a Catholic may be inclined to vote Democratic based on the Party’s position on issues of social justice and workers’ rights. However, this voter could also be inclined to vote Republican based on the GOP’s cultural positions – against abortion-rights and gay marriage. Dionne writes that these cross-pressures are what make the

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid, 44.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> E.J. Dionne, “There Is No Catholic Vote—And It’s Important,” in *American Catholics and Civic Engagement: A Distinctive Voice*, ed. Margaret O’Brian Steinfels (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 253. Dionne does not cite Taylor in his essay and it does not appear that he is using the term “cross pressures” in the same way that Taylor does.

Catholic voter “potentially disruptive for both parties.”<sup>111</sup> “As social scientists and theologians alike have repeatedly noted, Catholic political identity and engagement defy straight-forward characterization.”<sup>112</sup> Indeed, the case of PCO played a disruptive function not only in the arrangement of the electoral map but also in relation to other Catholic groups who expected to participate in the election in relation to their own Catholic beliefs.

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid, 254.

<sup>112</sup> Kristin E. Heyer and Mark J. Rozell, “Introduction,” in *Catholics and Politics: The Dynamic Tension Between Faith & Power*, ed. Kristin E. Heyer, et.al. (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1.



### 3.0 A SHORT HISTORY OF CATHOLIC POLITICAL AND CULTURAL PRESENCE IN THE UNITED STATES

#### 3.1 EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY: SEPARATISM AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

The political history of Catholics in the United States cannot be linked to any one political party. As Dionne points out in his article, “There Is No Catholic Vote – And It’s Important,” late nineteenth century Catholics were very much rooted in immigrant, ethnic, urban cultures.<sup>113</sup> Much of this Catholic immigrant population was also, as William Prendergast points out, poor and uneducated.<sup>114</sup> This social status, along with the prominent pro-labor positions of the Catholic Church such as Pope Leo XIII’s 1891 social encyclical *Rerum Novarum*<sup>115</sup> (On the Condition of Labor), which began the “modern” Catholic social tradition,<sup>116</sup> accounts in a

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<sup>113</sup> E.J. Dionne, “There is No Catholic Vote—And It’s Important,” in *American Catholics and Civic Engagement: A Distinctive Voice*, ed. Margaret O’Brian Steinfels (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 255.

<sup>114</sup> William Prendergast, *The Catholic Voter in American Politics: The Passing of the Democratic Monolith* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2007), 9.

<sup>115</sup> *Rerum Novarum* sought to address the detrimental effects that the industrial revolution had on the dignity of man, specifically the social problems it created such as child labor, sweatshops, urban poverty, dislocated families and a great gap between rich and poor. In the encyclical, Pope Leo identified the urgent need to protect the rights of workers as the pivotal solution to the question of industrial laborer. It was also a direct reaction to Marxism; while Leo agreed that poverty was caused in large part by unjust economic and social systems, he asserted that class warfare was not the solution to this problem. Rather, he offered the panacea of “class cooperation,” which he described as a fruitful alliance between workers and owners. Here, in the tradition of the Catholic notion of the common good, Leo elucidates the idea that serving the needs of all citizens, especially the poor and disadvantaged, is the duty of government (Kelley 2007, 30).

<sup>116</sup> Korzen and Kelley, 22.

general sense for the group's steady support of the Democratic Party throughout the early to mid-twentieth century. One of the most notable American Catholic figures of the 1930's and 40's is Dorothy Day, who, inspired by Peter Maurin's preaching of "a purified lay Catholic mission modeled after St. Francis of Assisi, founded the pro-labor newspaper, the *Catholic Worker* and opened a series of hospitality houses for the poor which operated on Catholic principles of true charity, humility, and pacifism.<sup>117</sup>

Better known amongst the greater American population during the Depression period was the "radio priest," Charles E. Coughlin, who, although usually remembered for the anti-Semitic fascism of his final radio broadcasts, advocated for the rights and dignity of the workingman during the Great Depression. His radio broadcasts, rich with Catholic social teaching that decried the growing concentration of wealth and encouraged workers to organize, reached tens of millions of listeners throughout the country during the broadcast's peak.<sup>118</sup> In his history of the American Catholic Church, *American Catholic*, Charles Morris notes that the fact that the leftist Day and, at times, fascist sounding Coughlin seemed to put forth the same fundamental principles confused most non-Catholic Americans. He writes that,

Confronted with such apparent contradictions, secular intellectuals tended to write off Catholic thinkers as either incoherent or deliberately obscurantist. But if the Church looked anti-intellectual or confused, it was only because its conclusions were so radically at variance with those of the prevailing secularist faith. The Catholic worldview was actually highly rational, and if anything, hyperconsistent, even though it did not fit within conventional 'liberal' and 'conservative' categories.<sup>119</sup>

This particular situation, regarding conventional American categories of mainstream political thought, is also very much apparent in the arguments and positions of Pittsburgh Catholics for

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<sup>117</sup> Charles Morris, *American Catholic: The Saints and Sinners Who Built America's Most Powerful Church* (New York: Random House, 1997), 142.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid, 145.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid, 149.

Obama, who would seem to fall into the “liberal” ideology on some issues and a more “conservative” ideology in regards to others.

Aside from the prominent social teachings of the Church, Catholic life in nineteenth and early twentieth century America was marked by a stark separatist culture. In *Separatism and Subculture*, Kane describes and analyzes the dilemma of Catholic separatism in early twentieth century Boston. She writes that the papal censure of modernism in 1907 resulted in the perpetuation of a separate Catholic subculture which sought to distinguish itself from the secular culture of American life.<sup>120</sup> In the closing chapter of her book, Kane writes of the paradoxical achievement of “separatist integration” of Boston Catholics. In response to secularization, the Catholic Church created a strong Catholic subculture in Boston “by creating and maintaining the social practices that governed the everyday lives of Catholic individuals and groups—sacred but equal, separated but integrated.”<sup>121</sup> This arrangement did not survive the many other historical forces at play, such as the Second World War, which integrated Catholics more and more into the general fabric of American society.

Although hardly a characteristic of members of Pittsburgh Catholics for Obama, this historical separatist location of American Catholics exemplifies well the cross-pressured position of the Catholic Church in a pluralist democracy such as the United States. Nineteenth and early twentieth century American Church officials, writes Prendergast, often encouraged the kind of separatism that existed during this period because they feared that exposure and contact with non-Catholic Americans in an environment that was for the most part hostile to the Church would “lead to a loss of faith.”<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Kane, 9.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 324.

<sup>122</sup> Prendergast, 19.

### 3.2 POST-WWII: THE RISE OF AMERICAN CATHOLICS

The period after World War II has been marked by many scholars as the dividing line between Catholics' humble and relatively sluggish economic beginnings in the U.S. and their rise to the middle and upper classes during the post-WWII period thanks largely to the educational opportunities provided by the GI Bill of Rights. At the end of the war, customary standards for measuring socioeconomic status still demonstrated Catholics overwhelming presence in the "lower class." But reports over the twenty year period from 1950 to 1970 indicate that Catholics were advancing up the socioeconomic ladder faster than any other religious subgroup except Jews.<sup>123</sup> This rise in economic and social status was greeted by American Church officials with mixed emotions due to its disparate consequences for the future of the American Catholic Church. Clearly, the discernable socioeconomic advancement of Catholics was a positive development. However, with this rise came entrance into the dominant and mainstream culture of the country, thus placing the American Church's successful strategy of fashioning an independent Catholic social structure potentially in jeopardy.<sup>124</sup>

Morris discusses the steady social assimilation of Catholics into mainstream American culture during this period, noting that by the late 1950's "emancipated Catholics chuckled at, were embarrassed by, or openly ridiculed the largely Irish Catholic folkways that still permeated their Church."<sup>125</sup> In order to further demonstrate the powerful turning away from the former separatist culture, Morris cites the example of Fr. James Gillis, the resolute editor of *Catholic*

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<sup>123</sup> Morris, 256.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid, 257.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid, 276.

*World*, who “was politely hooted at in the pages of (the Catholic magazine) *America* for advocating the traditional separatist Catholic stance toward mainstream American culture that he viewed as both bigoted and decadent.” “The separatist walls,” he writes, “were crumbling.”<sup>126</sup>

Adding to the fall of this separatist wall was the staunch anti-Communist stance of the Catholic Church. “To Catholics, Stalin was the Antichrist, a satanic figure of biblical proportions.”<sup>127</sup> Although this caused tensions between Catholics and secular liberals in the 1930’s, by the 1950’s the dominant American opinion had also become boldly anti-Communist. According to Morris, this was “a watershed in American Catholic history.”<sup>128</sup> For seemingly the first time, the heavy weight carried by Catholics—that because of their religion and separatist culture, they were not necessarily true Americans—was lifted. Finally, their patriotism and thus Americanism was acknowledged and praised. The policy shift in Washington’s attitude toward Communism, which came shortly after the death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, “was immediately satisfying for Catholics.”<sup>129</sup> It confirmed that their assessment of the Communist threat was correct and that for the first time in their history in the U.S., they were at the forefront of public opinion.

Although hyperpatriotism had long been a strategy of the American Catholic Church (they hoped it would help them be viewed in a more positive light by the American Protestant majority), this period saw a number of Church officials aligning a certain type of simpleminded sort of American patriotism with the Church itself. Notably, the well-known Cardinal Francis Spellman, in both public prayers and written poems, merged the two bodies into a unified, shining ideal. As quoted by Morris, Spellman wrote,

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid, 275.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 229.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid, 230.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 245.

*America, Our America!  
With dignity all sublime  
Thou art dedicated to Mary.  
Her mission is through thee;  
She feeds with thy hand;  
She soothes with thy touch;...  
To be light through thy light  
To be hope through thy hope,  
To be love through thy love.*<sup>130</sup>

The fall of the separatist walls also brought about a type of assimilation with non-Catholic American culture not previously experienced by American Catholics on such a mass scale. This integration with non-Catholic, affluent America contributed to a steady decline in Church membership and general Church commitment. In Philadelphia, for example, priests invariably complained of losing control of their parishioners.<sup>131</sup> This era marks the beginning of a declining Church whose numbers have yet to bounce back. In the earlier period, 70 percent of Catholics attended Mass on a weekly basis.<sup>132</sup> In contrast, fewer than 50 percent of Catholics attended Mass on a weekly basis in the 1990's.<sup>133</sup> From the period beginning in 1968 until the year 1997, the number of priests dropped by 19 percent, the number of nuns declined by 51 percent, and the number of Catholic elementary schools witnessed a 31 percent drop.<sup>134</sup> However, despite its steady decline in membership, the Catholic Church in America still has many more worshipers than any other single denomination.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Ibid, 278.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, 276.

<sup>132</sup> Prendergast, 20.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 21.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

### 3.3. SHIFTING GROUND: KENNEDY, VATICAN II AND THE ROE DECISION

American Catholics overwhelmingly supported John F. Kennedy, the second Catholic presidential candidate, in the election of 1960. This year, Catholics accounted for 20 to 25 percent of the U.S. population, depending on whether one credits parish registries or Census reports. Further, the Catholic population was growing at a rate twice as fast as the rest of the population.<sup>136</sup> It is also important to mention that during this period and in the following decades, the socioeconomic growth and upward mobility that Catholics were experiencing was largely due to educational achievement. In 1952 just 15 percent of the nation's college graduates were Catholic but by 1986, 25 percent were.

Many scholars cite the Kennedy election as a turning point not only for Catholics, but also for the nation's understanding of the place of religion in public life. As discussed earlier in the section on cross-pressures and secularization theory, as a result of consistent questioning by vocal Protestants about his loyalty to the Catholic Church and its potential complication for the office of the Presidency, Kennedy essentially secularized the presidency by insisting that religion is solely a private affair and has no business in the affairs of government.<sup>137</sup> "Kennedy, after all, hardly represented the traditional face of American Catholicism," writes Morris.

A graduate of Choate and Harvard, skeptical, ironic, and thoroughly secular, he symbolized, rather, the social fluidity and assimilationist promise of the American experiment. His victory may have been a triumph of religious freedom, or perhaps, as the late Fr. Gillis might have complained, merely a symptom of American 'indifferentism.'<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Morris, 256.

<sup>137</sup> Massa, 142.

<sup>138</sup> Morris, 281.

Kennedy's election thus marks at once, a triumph for Catholics in their aspirations to be seen as wholly American, and a loss of a united, Catholic separatist culture that saw strength in its distinctiveness. The discursive terms under which Kennedy was elected could be considered by critics of secularism, such as Connolly and even Richard Neuhaus, to represent the restrictive forces of secularism, which drive inward or under, religiously based discourses and convictions. It is an example of how secularism is actually restrictive and exclusionist and produces the illusion that the public square is neutral, when in fact, it was working on Kennedy as a force that pushed his religious convictions into this "private" realm. The American prelates and bishops, while perhaps celebrating the election of a Catholic were nevertheless disturbed by the full implications of Kennedy's election under the condition that he would keep his religion "private" and out of the way of the business of the state. The prelates of the American Church, writes Morris, "wrapped their faith with the thick institutional web that underscored the clarity, certainty and completeness of the Catholic vision and made it a mighty cultural force" (281). Thus Kennedy, if he really believed in Catholic doctrine, could be considered a cross-pressured subject in denial.

This period marked great change for Catholics in America due not only to the election of the first American Catholic president and the groups' steady socioeconomic rise, but also to the sweeping reforms of the Second Vatican Council, which "inaugurated an era of increased Church engagement with society and culture"<sup>139</sup> and expanded an already existing movement in the U.S. to break down the walls of Catholic separatism.<sup>140</sup> In its four main "constitutions," the Council highlights the social role of the Church and calls for a renewed emphasis on spirituality and

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<sup>139</sup> Korzen and Kelley, 33.

<sup>140</sup> Prendergast, 19.



scripture.<sup>141</sup> On the final day of the Council meetings in 1965, one of the most significant documents of Catholic social teaching, *Gaudium et Spes* (“Joy and Hope,” also known as the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World) was issued. Its title comes from a line within the document that stresses the importance of solidarity. The document dictates that Catholics must stand up and confront the unethical global rift between the rich and poor, “which violates the principles of social justice and human dignity.”<sup>142</sup> Key to the instructive elements of this document is that the methods proposed to fight this increasing global gap call the believer to “move beyond a morality grounded in individualism to one rooted in community.”<sup>143</sup>

The Church’s renewal of social justice concerns brought about by Vatican II, however, was soon disrupted by the Supreme Court decision of 1973 in the *Roe v. Wade* case, which declared that the Constitution guaranteed the right to abort a fetus and that the power of government to regulate that right varied.<sup>144</sup> According to Prendergast, this issue “shocked many Catholics into heightened political activism.”<sup>145</sup> The issue of abortion thus constitutes a primary consideration in understanding Catholic voting patterns in the last forty years. When *Roe v. Wade*, established the right to abortion as a constitutional right, abortion took on an unexpectedly paramount dimension within the national political and cultural discourse. As stated earlier, the American Catholic church, pre-*Roe*, had been, to a large degree, the voice of the workingman on the American political scene. The *Roe* decision immediately garnered sharp criticism from the National Council of Catholic Bishops. They launched a campaign to amend the Constitution in

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<sup>141</sup> Korzen and Kelley, 33.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Prendergast, 152.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid, 29.

order to revoke the decision in the Roe case.<sup>146</sup> Out of this action emerged The National Right to Life Committee, which opened its doors to all opponents of the federal legalization of abortion regardless of religious affiliation, and the 1974-75 Human Life Amendment to the Constitution, which aimed to reverse the Roe decision. Advocates of this Amendment were unable to attain more than a committee meeting for it in the Senate and not even that in the House of Representatives.<sup>147</sup> The issue has remained a galvanizing force in American politics and has proven to be a pivotal point in several elections beginning most evidently with the election of Ronald Regan in 1980.

For many scholars, the 1973 decision marks the beginning of what eventually became known as the “culture wars” in American politics – the political and cultural polarization over social issues such as abortion, homosexuality, school prayer and affirmative action. Although not initially great supporters of the Roe decision—Ted Kennedy was critical of the decision as was, for a short time, Jimmy Carter—the Democratic Party’s rhetoric on the abortion issue wavered during the 1970’s and 80’s. In 1976 the Party’s platform included sympathetic language when describing the “Pro-Life” position. It stated “we fully recognize the religious and ethical concerns which many Americans have about abortion.”<sup>148</sup> But by 1980 the word “abortion” was removed from the Party’s platform and replaced with “reproductive freedom,” which was termed a “fundamental human right.”<sup>149</sup> During this time, the Roe v. Wade decision became explicitly endorsed by the Democratic Party, which eventually went so far as to articulate support for government funding of abortions in 1988. This year proved to be a milestone for the Party’s position on abortion because it now “gave unambiguous signals” in a direction away from its

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<sup>146</sup> Prendergast, 170.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, 195.

previous efforts to court a substantial segment of Catholic voters who firmly opposed abortion. Courting the Catholic vote “had slipped downward in its scale of priorities”<sup>150</sup> because the Democratic Party, which had formerly relied on the Catholic vote, had now built a new and different coalition of voters.

During the 1980’s, American Catholics continued to climb the socioeconomic ladder and the Americanization of European ethnics persisted as urban, ethnic neighborhoods dissolved and locals moved into the suburbs.<sup>151</sup> Due to this phenomenon, coupled with the effects of the Roe decision, the long-term alliance of Catholics to the Democratic Party continued to shift. As alluded to in the paragraph above, Party alignments on the issue of abortion were ambiguous until 1980.<sup>152</sup> During the time between the Roe decision and 1980, various religious groups – Mormons, Catholics, and Evangelicals amongst others – took powerful stances in protest of Roe and abortion in general. It was during this period that “pro-choice” and “pro-life” interest groups emerged as major lobbying forces in Congress.<sup>153</sup>

Many political science scholars identify the 1980’s as a period of political realignment in American politics. More specifically, this period witnessed a notable realignment of the Catholic vote.<sup>154</sup> Prendergast states that, “the proportion of Catholics of Democratic affiliation and voting habits shrank; the ranks of Catholic Republicans and Independents increased; and the activist cadres in the Republican Party were diversified by an infusion of Catholics in Party and public office.”<sup>155</sup> In 1980 Ronald Reagan’s anti-abortion position, along with his rhetoric emphasizing a return to family values and community, appealed greatly to Catholic voters. When he ran again

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 196.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, 178.

<sup>152</sup> William V. D’Antonio, et al., “Catholicism, Abortion, and the Emergence of the ‘Culture Wars in the U.S. Congress, 1971-2006” (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2008), 132.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Prendergast, 178.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

in 1984 for re-election, this position garnered him a whopping 61 percent of the Catholic vote. Never before had a Republican Presidential candidate fared so well among Catholic voters.<sup>156</sup> Some political scientists credit the emergence of the abortion issue, as a central bone of contention within national mainstream political discourse, to the corresponding rise of Catholics in American society at large.<sup>157</sup>

In 1984 then-New York Governor Mario Cuomo gave a Kennedyesque speech at The University of Notre Dame entitled, "Religious Belief and Public Morality: A Catholic Governor's Perspective." The speech tried to reconcile Catholic beliefs and doctrine with public and civic responsibilities.<sup>158</sup> In the speech Cuomo articulated his belief that, while he adhered to Church teaching on the inviolability of human life from conception onwards, this belief nevertheless did not demand that he work for creating or supporting legislation that would favor this belief due to the fact that the United States is a pluralistic democracy. In general, Cuomo articulated a position similar to that of Kennedy's during his 1960 Presidential campaign – that Catholics should participate in public life and when doing so, their highest priority should be given to their oath of office, not to religious belief or dogma, in regards to carrying out public laws.<sup>159</sup> "Of course there are differences both in degree and quality between abortion and some of the other religious positions that the Church takes: abortion is a "matter of life and death," and degree counts," Cuomo said.

But the differences in approach reveal a truth, I think, that is not well enough perceived by Catholics and therefore still further complicates the process for us. That is, while we always owe our bishops' words respectful attention and careful consideration, the question whether to engage the political system in a struggle to

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<sup>156</sup> Prendergast, 179.

<sup>157</sup> D'Antonio, 131.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

have it adopt certain articles of our belief as part of the public morality, is not a matter of doctrine: it is a matter of prudential political judgment.<sup>160</sup>

Numerous American bishops and prelates criticized Cuomo's position. A month after his September speech, then-Archbishop of New York John O'Connor publicly rejected Cuomo's argument, calling for politicians to take the lead in enacting legislation to ban abortion. "What do we ask of a candidate or someone already in office?" O'Connor stated. "Nothing more than this: a statement opposing abortion on demand, and a commitment to work for a modification of the permissive interpretations issued on the subject by the United States Supreme Court."<sup>161</sup> Further, O'Connor repudiated Cuomo's assertions that laws to curb abortion will not necessarily work and that he cannot impose his Catholic morality on others. "It is obvious that law is not the entire answer to abortion," O'Connor said. "Nor is it the entire answer to theft, arson, child abuse or shooting police officers. Everybody knows that. But who would suggest that we repeal the laws against such crimes because the laws are so often broken."

Cuomo's speech is representative of many Catholic Democratic politicians' position on the issue of abortion to this day. 2008 Democratic Vice Presidential candidate Joe Biden was heavily criticized by Denver Bishop Charles Chaput and others for embracing a standpoint almost identical to Cuomo's. Asked by interviewer Tim Russert in April of 2007 about the evolution of his position on abortion<sup>162</sup> in regards to his Catholic faith, Biden responded that he was a practicing Catholic and believes that life begins at conception. However, he said, he would not impose this view on others. "Look Tim," he said, "I am a practicing Catholic and it is the biggest dilemma for me in terms of comporting my religious and cultural views with my political

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<sup>160</sup> *New York Times*, "Excerpts from Cuomo address at Notre Dame," September 14, 1984.

<sup>161</sup> *Washington Post*, "Officials Should Oppose Abortion, Prelate Says," October 16, 1984.

<sup>162</sup> Biden, who began his career in the Senate in 1972, thought for many years that *Roe v. Wade* had not been correctly decided and that the right to an abortion was not secured by the Constitution. He later came to back the abortion rights position. See Joe Biden, interview by Tim Russert, *Meet the Press*, NBC, April 29, 2007.

responsibility.”<sup>163</sup> Seemingly aware of what he describes as his “biggest dilemma,” Biden appears here to be the ultimate cross-pressured subject, ultimately deciding, on the issue of abortion, to keep his religious beliefs on the subject outside of what he sees as his political responsibilities.

In reaction to what he sees as faulty reasoning on Biden’s part, Bishop Chaput argued that “resistance to abortion is a matter of human rights, not religious opinion, and the senator knows very well as a lawmaker that all law involves the imposition of some people’s convictions on everyone else. That is the nature of the law,” he said a week after Biden’s *Meet the Press* appearance.<sup>164</sup> He further argued that,

American Catholics have allowed themselves to be bullied into accepting the destruction of more than a million developing unborn children a year. Other people have imposed their 'pro-choice' beliefs on American society without any remorse for decades.<sup>165</sup>

Twenty some years after the Cuomo speech, Bishop Chaput, reacting to Biden’s re-articulation of Cuomo’s dilemma, rebuts Biden’s claim that the law supersedes religiously based moral convictions. In Chaput’s rebuttal we can see how the Church’s position is not anchored only on the ground of religiously held convictions, but in fact has taken its claims on human life to the ground of legal argumentation on the universality of human rights, a claim that people like Charles Taylor would probably say derives from Christian teaching anyway.

It is interesting to note that Korzen and Kelley also address the Cuomo speech in their chapter on “Church and State,” stating that “Cuomo, like Kennedy, was distinguishing between his religion and his responsibilities as a public official in a democratic society.”<sup>166</sup> The authors

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<sup>163</sup> See Joe Biden, interview by Tim Russert, *Meet the Press*, NBC, April 29, 2007.

<sup>164</sup> Patsy McGarry, “Denver archbishop attacks Biden’s stance on abortion,” *The Irish Times*, September 10, 2008, Other world stories, Pg. 11.

<sup>165</sup> McGarry, *The Irish Times*, September 10, 2008.

<sup>166</sup> Korzen and Kelley, 59.

note that many Catholic leaders found fault with Cuomo's position, and, seemingly in concurrence with such leaders, write that "while ending abortion is clearly an article of faith, it is also for many Americans and for the Catholic Church an article of peace, just like our duty to oppose murder, poverty, war, and other threats to human life."<sup>167</sup>

The dilemma faced and addressed by Kennedy, Cuomo and Biden can be contextualized in the discussion that Catholic intellectual Richard Neuhaus develops in his chapter, "The Morality of Compromise" in his book, *The Naked Public Square* (1984). Throughout the book, Neuhaus argues that the conception of the public square as a value neutral space is incorrect.<sup>168</sup> "One enters the democratic arena as a moral actor."<sup>169</sup> Thus to take part in an exercise of compromise is to engage as a moral actor. The thinking of Neuhaus on this dilemma is relevant to consider, given both Cuomo and Biden's positions on the subject of abortion. While not rejecting compromise, Neuhaus' analysis of this kind of dilemma points out that, "within the context of healthy democratic contention, a compromise is not the abandonment of religious duty but is the fulfillment of a religious duty. It is such a fulfillment, that is, if one believes that Christianity has a stake in advancing democratic governance."<sup>170</sup> Neuhaus states that

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Commenting on the consequences of the Supreme Court ruling in *Zorach v. Clauson* (1952), Neuhaus observes that, "religion no longer referred to those communal traditions of ultimate beliefs and practices ordinarily called religion. Religion, in the court's meaning became radically individualized and privatized. Religion became a synonym for conscience... Thus religion is no longer a matter of content but of sincerity. It is no longer a matter of communal values, but of conviction. In short, it is no longer a public reality and therefore cannot interfere with public business" (Neuhaus, 80). It would seem that this is the definition of religion that one finds to be operative in the discourse of Kennedy, Cuomo and Biden. Neuhaus radicalizes his observation on the privatization of religion by arguing that the privatization of religion is in fact a religious evacuation. "Such a religious evacuation of the public square cannot be sustained either in concept or in practice" (80). Neuhaus in fact argues that the public square is never neutral or free of moral content. He states that, "when recognizable religion is excluded, the vacuum will be filled by *ersatz* religion, by religion bootlegged into public space under other names. Again, to paraphrase Spinoza: transcendence abhors a vacuum. The reason why the naked public square cannot, in fact, remain naked is in the very nature of law and laws. If law and laws are not seen to be coherently related to basic presuppositions about right and wrong, good and evil, they will be condemned as illegitimate" (80).

<sup>169</sup> Neuhaus, 125.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid, 124.

“democracy is the defense against premature closure” and that the restlessness of a democracy is indicative of its political wellness.<sup>171</sup>

Thus, exclusivist secularists who claim that moral judgments that are informed by religious belief should be kept out of the public square are in error. Here the pronouncement of a moral claim is an encumbrance on what is suppose to be an almost value-free space. However, writes Neuhaus, “morally serious people...cannot divide themselves so neatly.”<sup>172</sup> Although the morally serious actor often translates his religious language into secular, civic language, he is still the same person in both realms of life, Neuhaus contends. Thus, Neuhaus would argue that within the political dilemma faced by politicians such as Kennedy, Cuomo and Biden, we do not have an “instance of moral judgment versus value-free secular reason”.<sup>173</sup> In fact, the discourse of these politicians represents an unacknowledged instance of “moralities in conflict.”<sup>174</sup> For Neuhaus, moralities in conflict are not the problem. Rather, open acknowledgement of this situation could be the beginning of a necessary dialogue. Neuhaus adds that, “the notion of moralities in conflict is utterly essential to remedying the problems posed by the naked public square.”<sup>175</sup> “Those who want to bring religiously based values to bear in public discourse have an obligation, however, to expose the myth of value-neutrality that is so often exploited by their opponents.”<sup>176</sup> Politics, Neuhaus concludes, is inevitably a moral endeavor and undertaking. If Kennedy, Cuomo and Biden were guided by Neuhaus’ argument that the public square is not a morally value-free space, their recognition of the dilemma would be marked by an urgency that

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid, 125.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid.

<sup>175</sup> In the beginning of his book, Neuhaus writes that, “the naked public square is the result of political doctrine and practice that would exclude religion and religiously grounded values from the conduct of public business. The doctrine is that America is a secular society. It finds dogmatic the expression in the ideology of secularism. I will argue that the doctrine is demonstrably false and the dogma exceedingly dangerous” See Neuhaus, ix.

<sup>176</sup> Ibid, 125.



could not contemplate postponement of finding a solution. Obviously, other Catholics experienced a greater degree of discomfort with this new law and became disillusioned with Democratic politicians who recognized the dilemma, but did not have the political imagination necessary to figure out how they might change the law and still get elected. This left the Republican Party with a golden opportunity to capture their vote by articulating agreement with the moral position of these Catholics and other disapproving citizens.

Let us now continue with the historical narrative of Catholic political participation in the U.S. over the last thirty years. It should be noted that, in keeping with the spirit of Vatican II and Catholic engagement with the modern world, the 1980's also saw the American Bishops and other Church hierarchy addressing public policy concerns in a very vocal and direct manner, as demonstrated earlier by the abortion debate between Cuomo and O'Connor. Beyond the abortion debate, the Bishops expressed their concerns about the proliferation of nuclear weapons in a statement entitled *The Challenge of Peace* (1983). In 1986 they constructed a statement on the economic system called *Economic Justice For All*.<sup>177</sup> The issue of abortion, as we have seen, was also raised frequently in public discourse and many prelates indicated their support for both Presidents Reagan and Bush based on their positions on the matter.<sup>178</sup>

During the 1980 campaign, though fairly quiet so as not to indicate an endorsement of either presidential candidate, American bishops both issued a statement on “political responsibility,” and warned against single-issue voting, a move that indicated to many within the

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<sup>177</sup> This document called for a thorough reform of the nation's welfare system and income support program in order to ensure requisite levels of support for the poor with the aim of making them self-sufficient through fruitful employment when viable. It was criticized heavily by American Catholic neoconservatives, such as Michael Novak, George Weigel and Richard John Neuhaus, who wanted the U.S. Church to recognize the benefits of capitalism. In general, Catholic neoconservatives are supportive of U.S. economic systems and critical of the Catholic liberal establishment, which they think has been too critical of the U.S. and too credulous in its appreciation of movements associated with Marxism, especially Liberation Theology. See Charles E. Curran, “The Reception of Catholic Social and Economic Teaching in the United States,” in *Modern Catholic Social Teaching*, ed. Kenneth B. Himes (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2005), 482-483.

<sup>178</sup> Prendergast, 180.

Church hierarchy an effort to downplay the importance that the abortion issue should play in guiding the voting decisions of Catholics.<sup>179</sup> In 1983, Congress voted to formally open diplomatic relations with the Vatican and a year later Reagan appointed William A. Wilson Ambassador to the Holy See.<sup>180</sup> This action indicated yet again that Catholics had been more than fully accepted into the mainstream of American society and that many of the previous suspicions and doubts regarding their allegiance to the nation had now all but disappeared. This rise of Catholics into the mainstream of American society also coincided with a changed demographic environment in which Protestants were beginning to represent less of a majority. Given this demographic shift as well as cultural shifts that became paramount in the 1960's and 70's, it also seemed to be becoming clear to the Republican Party that the Catholic vote was worth wooing.

### **3.4 THE THIRD MILLENNIUM: FIGHTING FOR THE CATHOLIC VOTE**

Skipping ahead to the 1990's, we see that Bill Clinton's ability to regain the Catholic vote away from the Republicans was essential to his 1992 victory. This was achieved in part by strategist James Carville's famous slogan, "It's the economy stupid." But Clinton was also very savvy about discussing the social issues that concerned Catholics and other social moderates and conservatives. His Democratic Leadership Council helped coin and then adopted the phrase, "Community, Opportunity, Responsibility," fusing a strong stance on crime with pro-work

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid, 184.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid, 180.

welfare that emphasized a “compassionate state.”<sup>181</sup> It is interesting to note that the Reagan emphasis on family values that appealed to Catholics and other religious groups was replaced in the Clinton vocabulary by a greater emphasis on secular organizational principles. On abortion in particular, however, Clinton straddled his “pro-choice” stance with an acknowledgment that he was not for abortions. He described his approach to this subject in another persuasive slogan – “Safe, legal and rare.”<sup>182</sup> This phrase, writes Dionne, “gave Catholics a chance to latch onto the last word – to the later frustration of some who thought he lost that word somewhere along the way.”<sup>183</sup> Although Clinton may have edged out the Catholic vote in the 1990’s, Karl Rove, George W. Bush’s lead strategist, was carefully calculating how to capture the Catholic vote for his candidate during the few years prior to Bush’s national presidential campaign.

While working on Bush’s 1998 gubernatorial campaign, Rove received a copy of conservative Catholic Deal Hudson’s magazine *Crisis*.<sup>184</sup> In an article entitled, “The Catholic Vote: Does It Swing?” Hudson revealed the results of a recently performed poll that showed that Catholics who attended Mass on a regular basis were more likely to vote Republican than their less observant counterparts. Hudson wrote,

Catholics, at fifty million strong and growing, have emerged as the Holy Grail of coalition politics, and they have the distinction of clustering in states rich in electoral votes, like Florida, Texas, California, New York, Ohio and Illinois.<sup>185</sup>

Rove soon introduced Hudson to then-Governor Bush and an alliance was made. Once Bush was elected, he brought Hudson in as a consultant on Catholic issues and Hudson soon began

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<sup>181</sup> E.J. Dionne, “There Is No Catholic Vote—And It’s Important,” in *American Catholics and Civic Engagement: A Distinctive Voice*, ed. Margaret O’Brian Steinfels (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 256.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid.

<sup>184</sup> Garry Wills, *Head and Heart: American Christianities* (New York: Penguin Press, 2007), 520.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

promoting Catholic appointments.<sup>186</sup> Although Hudson was later disgraced by accusations of sexual misconduct by one of his female students at Fordham University, he was soon replaced in his position as Catholic consultant to the president by Richard John Neuhaus, author of *The Naked Public Square*.

Neuhaus' magazine *First Things* was more influential than Hudson's *Crisis*, and he proved to be more useful for one of Rove's main priorities – building a political alliance between Catholics and Evangelicals over the wedge issue of abortion.<sup>187</sup> Bush referred to Neuhaus as “Father Richard,” and according to Wills, was most pleased quoting Neuhaus on what Bush called the “life issues,” such as abortion and stem cell research. In fact, Neuhaus had already been forging an alliance between Catholics and Evangelicals in the early 1990's. *First Things* fostered a series of meetings between these two groups that constructed several statements of concurrence called “Evangelicals and Catholics Together” (ECT).<sup>188</sup> In the first of these statements, within the section entitled, “We Contend Together,” printed in the May, 1994 volume of *First Things*, the authors state that,

With the Founders, we hold that all human beings are endowed by their Creator with the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The statement that the unborn child is a human life that-barring natural misfortune or lethal intervention-will become what everyone recognizes as a human baby is not a religious assertion. It is a statement of simple biological fact. That the unborn child has a right to protection, including the protection of law, is a moral statement supported by moral reason and biblical truth. We, therefore, will persist in contending-we will not be discouraged but will multiply every effort-in order to secure the legal protection of the unborn.<sup>189</sup>

As can be seen in the above quote, the first ECT document was devoted to addressing the issue of abortion, which has served as one of the fundamental links between the two groups. This

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid, 521.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid, 522.

<sup>189</sup> Charles Colson, et.al., “Evangelicals and Catholics Come Together: The Christian Mission in the Third Millennium,” *First Things* 43, (May 1994): 15-22.

alliance, in which Neuhaus participated so prominently, constitutes one of the critical points for the recent disillusion of some Catholics with the Republican Party, exemplified by some PCO members and the Party's failure to fulfill its promises to work towards overturning the Roe decision or toward passing laws that restrict or limit abortion. It is also important to note the historical significance of this alliance. As Wills points out, "back in the days of Al Smith, or even John Kennedy, Protestants would have been horrified at the idea of a Catholic priest advising a president on important matters."<sup>190</sup> But because of Catholic integration and the passionate sharing of a fundamental and for them, transcendental, conviction on the life of the unborn fetus, Evangelicals were most pleased to have "Father Richard" advising President Bush. It was Neuhaus and his fellow *First Things* peers who called for bishops to deny Catholic political candidates communion in 2004. This move was opposed by 72 percent of American Catholics and 68 percent of the general population.<sup>191</sup> Interestingly, only 42 percent of Evangelicals opposed this action,<sup>192</sup> indicating their approval of such "punishment" for public servants' support of abortion rights. Although Bush won a large minority of the Catholic vote in 2000 (46 percent), he won a majority of this vote in 2004 (52 percent). "In close elections," writes Wills, "these numbers were vital, and they confirmed Rove's reputation and his master plan."<sup>193</sup> Rove's discovery of the pivotal importance of the Catholic vote was not lost on Democratic politicians as they regrouped for the 2008 presidential election.

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<sup>190</sup> Wills, 523.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

## **4.0 THE STORY AND POSITIONS OF PITTSBURGH CATHOLICS FOR OBAMA**

### **4.1 INTRODUCING PCO**

On August 20, 2008 John Kelly, the Pennsylvania Catholic Vote Director for the Obama campaign, sent out a mass email to Pennsylvania Catholic Democrats notifying them of future organizational meetings all across the state and inviting them to join in the Obama grassroots efforts to defeat John McCain in November. The first Pittsburgh segment of Pennsylvania Catholics for Obama met on August 23, 2008 at the Thorp, Reed & Armstrong, LLP offices in downtown Pittsburgh. A little more than a dozen Catholics attended this introductory meeting led by Kelly, who began the meeting by having participants go around the table and introduce themselves, telling the group their name, parish, job and the issue(s) that mattered most to them in the election. As the group developed, it came to include a number of lawyers, ex- and retired priests, nuns, businessmen, community activists, college professors and graduate students. The Iraq war was probably the issue of greatest concern, along with the general feeling that then-President Bush and his administration had spent much of the past eight years carrying out policies that demonstrated a blatant disregard for the dignity of the human person (the “unjust”

Iraq war,<sup>194</sup> the practice of torture,<sup>195</sup> tax cuts for the wealthiest one percent, etc.), solidarity (a collective feeling that Bush had divided the country through fear tactics was expressed multiple times during the meeting) and the common good.

Many participants vocalized their anger over the President and his administration's lack of adherence to basic social justice doctrine. Some also voiced their anger over the Republican Party's use of the issues of abortion and the Catholic faith as a wedge to both divide Catholics and the nation in order to win elections. Some, including one of the group's most prominent members, Duquesne Law School Dean Nicholas Cafardi, expressed disillusionment over the Party's failed promises to effect change on the abortion issue. Cafardi had become convinced, he said, that contrary to their position on the matter, the Republican Party had no real intention to ending the legal practice of abortion in the U.S. In fact, he expressed, the abortion issue had proved to be a most effective wedge issue for the Republicans and he believed that they intended to keep it alive in order to win elections.

One of the most important problems and dilemmas for PCO, who believed that Obama's positions on issues of social justice and the war in Iraq were the correct political and moral positions, was having to face the standing Catholic position on abortion as an intrinsic evil. As a result, over the course of the remaining months until the November election, members of PCO were consistently having to defend their support for Obama, a candidate in favor of abortion

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<sup>194</sup> Before the Iraq war began in March of 2003, Pope John Paul II stated that the war could not be either morally or legally justified. Further, he said, it was a defeat for humanity. See Mark and Louise Zwick, "Pope John Paul II calls War a Defeat for Humanity: Neoconservative Iraq Just War Theories Rejected," *Houston Catholic Worker Newspaper*, July-August 2003, <http://www.cjd.org/paper/jp2war.html> (accessed April 15, 2009).

<sup>195</sup> Pope Benedict XVI's top official for justice issues stated in December of 2005 that methods of torture were unacceptable for attempting to obtain information that might or might not foil a terrorist attack. See Associated Press, "Pope Says Torture Shouldn't Be Used Against Terror," *USA Today*, December 13, 2005, [http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2005-12-13-pope\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/religion/2005-12-13-pope_x.htm) (accessed April 15, 2009). The United States Council of Catholic Bishops' 2007 document, *Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship - A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States*, identifies torture (as well as euthanasia, human cloning, embryonic research, genocide, racism, and the targeting of noncombatants in acts of terror or war) as an intrinsic evil. See "Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship," 2007, Pg. 8.

rights.<sup>196</sup> To many of their Catholic peers this position was unacceptable not only for Catholics, but for anyone who believes in human rights and human dignity. This problem forced PCO and many other progressive Catholic groups to create a well-reasoned case, rooted in Catholic teaching, for supporting Obama despite the fact that he is “pro-choice.”

Along with other progressive Catholic organizations that stressed Catholic teachings on social justice, such as Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good<sup>197</sup> and Catholics United,<sup>198</sup> PCO devised a strategy that allowed them to shift the emphasis from the correctness of their ethical position on abortion to finding a path within the existing political milieu that would allow them to get closer to the plurality of their objectives. They argued that while the Republican Party has consistently run on a “pro-life” platform, the Party has in fact done nothing in the past thirty-some years to indicate a serious interest in ensuring the overturning of the 1973 decision. In mounting this more restricted political argument, PCO also pointed out the fact that even if *Roe v. Wade* were overturned, abortion rights would not really be eliminated. Rather, the decision would just be transferred back to the states. Further, PCO saw Obama’s leadership within the Democratic Party critical in laying out, for the first time within the Party’s positions, policies that would reduce the need for abortions. In the words of Douglas Kmiec, who authored an article with prominent PCO member Nicholas Cafardi, Senator Obama’s efforts “brought greater balance into the 2008 Democratic platform to ‘strongly acknowledge’ the interest of a

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<sup>196</sup> The last section of the Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good document, *Voting for the Common Good*, entitled, “Frequently Asked Questions,” the unnamed authors pose the following question: “Some members of my parish are telling others that it is a sin to vote for certain candidates. What should I do?” The answer paragraph explains that any sort of scare tactics used to bully other Catholics into voting for or against a particular candidate “violates Catholic teaching on conscience, prudence, and human freedom.” It further states to the reader that if they are experiencing such bullying in their parish, they should immediately contact their pastor or diocesan office. Also, it states, they can report these incidents to their organization (phone number provided).

<sup>197</sup> Alexia Kelley, co-author of *A Nation For All: How the Catholic Vision of the Common Good Can Save America From the Politics of Division* (2008), is the principal founder and executive director of Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good.

<sup>198</sup> Chris Korzen, co-author of *A Nation For All: How the Catholic Vision of the Common Good Can Save America From the Politics of Division* (2008), is co-founder and executive director of Catholics United.



woman in having her child and the need for appropriate income support and prenatal care to make this choice more likely.”<sup>199</sup> Kmiec sees the need, at this present moment in history, to “find meaningful alternatives” to get past “the interminable ‘clash of absolutes.’”<sup>200</sup> Referring to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (USCCB) 2005 document, “Themes of Catholic Social Teaching,” Kmiec notes that the Church hierarchy sees the undeniable relationship between the protection of the human person and the way in which society is organized. “What the Church asks is protection of human life—by whatever appropriate means,” he writes. “The appropriate means chosen by Senator Obama is often labeled Catholics’ best kept secret—its social teaching.”<sup>201</sup> Moreover, Kmiec points out that Obama has an incisive understanding of how closely economic conditions and abortion are related and he seeks to increase funding for prenatal care and maternity leave.<sup>202</sup> He further notes that from 1979 to 1990, a period when the country was led by Republican presidents and dealing with an inflationary economy, “the annual rate of abortion increased by 14.2 percent, resulting in an additional 740,000 abortions.”<sup>203</sup> In contrast, the more economically stable period following that decade saw a significant decrease in the annual rate by 34 percent, meaning, he writes, “that approximately 2.3 million children who would have been aborted are alive today.”<sup>204</sup>

Departing from an implicit familiarity with the arguments of Korzen and Kelley, whose book on how the Catholic vision of the common good can heal a politically divided nation was mentioned and referenced at PCO meetings, PCO vocalized what they saw as the flawed and

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<sup>199</sup> Douglas Kmiec, *Can A Catholic Support Him? Asking the Big Question About Barack Obama*, (Woodstock, NY: The Overlook Press, 2008), 33.

<sup>200</sup> Kmiec, 68. “Clash of absolutes” is a phrase termed by Harvard University Constitutional Law scholar, Laurence Tribe that refers to the current abortion debate in the United States.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid.

<sup>202</sup> Douglas Kmiec, “How Catholics Can Oppose Abortion, Back Obama,” *Chicago Tribune*, September 9, 2008, <http://archives.chicagotribune.com/2008/sep/09/nation/chi-oped0909kmiecsep09> (accessed June 25, 2009).

<sup>203</sup> Ibid.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

unproductive state of the current abortion debate. As they saw it, the current debate consists of vocal voices on the extremes of each side of the argument talking past each other and thus failing to address the problem of abortion in a practical way. Recognizing that abortion constitutes a direct attack on human life, PCO saw Obama's position on the issue more practical and acceptable in working toward a reduction of abortions in the U.S. than that of the Republicans and John McCain. They, like Korzen and Kelley, referred to Pope John Paul II's 1995 encyclical *Evangelium Vitae* (The Gospel of Life) to support Obama's credibility in seeking to reduce the number of abortions performed by eliminating the social ills that cause them. In this document, the then Pope called for eradicating the underlying causes of threats to human life "especially by ensuring proper support for families and motherhood." He further continued that,

it is also necessary to rethink labour, urban, residential and social service policies so as to harmonize working schedules with time available for the family, so that it becomes effectively possible to take care of children and the elderly.<sup>205</sup>

In their discussions on the subject, PCO members tied this statement to Obama's various promises on the subject, including his support of paid maternity leave to ensure that families would not lose their employment for having a child, his commitment to making investments in affordable daycare, and his pledge to cut taxes for 95 percent of all working families, amongst other intentions in concert with Pope John Paul II's statement. Obama, they noted, has been a proponent of increased support for adoption agencies and decisively opposes late term abortions, with an exception for the mother's health.<sup>206</sup> In what follows I will report and analyze the reasoning that led three prominent members of PCO, with whom I have conducted extensive

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<sup>205</sup> Pope John Paul II, "Evangelium Vitae," The Vatican, [http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25031995\\_evangelium-vitae\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae_en.html) (accessed March 2009).

<sup>206</sup> Matthew 25 Network, "Pro Life Pro Obama: What Barack Obama Will Do," Matthew 25 Network, [http://www.prolifeproobama.com/plpo\\_willdo.htm](http://www.prolifeproobama.com/plpo_willdo.htm) (accessed February 2009).

interviews, to support Obama “despite” his “pro-choice” position and his ties to the abortion rights forces within American society.

## 4.2 METHODOLOGY

My empirical study of PCO is grounded in the ethnographic method.<sup>207</sup> It includes both participant-observation I conducted during the fall of 2008 and formal interviews I carried out with various PCO members during the winter of 2009. In general, the ethnographic method involves the ethnographer participating either conspicuously or inconspicuously in the daily lives of a group or person for an extended period of time. The work consists of observing the group’s activities, listening to what is said, asking questions, as well as participating in their activities and discussions.<sup>208</sup> In doing this, I, as a researcher, constructed a written record of my observations and experiences among the group.<sup>209</sup> There has been significant growth in the authority and the use of ethnography as an approach to social research in recent decades in part due to disillusionment with quantitative methods that for so long held the supreme position in the social sciences.<sup>210</sup>

The process of interviewing informants is crucial to the ethnographic method as it allows the researcher “to ask a series of direct questions of people who know some pieces of the

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<sup>207</sup> As expressed in Professor Clark Chilson’s seminar, “Ethnography: Study of Religion.” (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, Spring Semester 2009).

<sup>208</sup> Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. (London: Routledge, 1995), 1.

<sup>209</sup> Robert M. Emerson and Linda L. Shaw, eds., *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1995), 1.

<sup>210</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, 1.

puzzle.”<sup>211</sup> In addition to participant-observation, which usually entails informal conversations (a type of interview in and of itself), the formal interview process allows for a clearer viewpoint on an informant’s personal experience and attitudes to be gained and later incorporated into the ethnographic analysis.<sup>212</sup>

I have also engaged in an analysis of campaign literature and media texts in order to explore PCO’s positions and their location within the wider media landscape and discussion. Interviews were conducted with three key PCO players. The first is Nicholas Cafardi, Dean Emeritus at the Duquesne University Law School. Cafardi is especially compelling because he has voted Republican at the presidential level consistently since the early 1980’s. The second is Patricia McCann, a Sister of Mercy at Carlow University and life-long Democrat. The third is Michael Drohan, a former missionary in Africa and priest and current President of the Board of Directors for The Thomas Merton Center in Pittsburgh.<sup>213</sup> While these individuals are not intended to serve as representatives for PCO as a whole, they offer unique perspectives and insights on their reasons and motivations for participating in PCO and supporting Obama’s candidacy. I should also mention that I have relied on Catherine Kohler Riessman’s *Narrative Analysis* (1993), a manual for the transcription, analysis and interpretation of data for the investigation and interpretation on which I will now embark.

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<sup>211</sup> Donald E. Miller and Jay Seltzer, “Interviewing,” in *Writing and Research in Religious Studies* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1992), 70.

<sup>212</sup> Hammersley and Atkinson, 25.

<sup>213</sup> The Thomas Merton Center, which also refers to itself as “Pittsburgh’s Peace and Social Justice Center,” is a resource and organizing center devoted to over 25 projects centered around the goal of achieving a more peaceful and just world through nonviolent struggle. See The Thomas Merton Center Website Home, <http://www.thomasmertoncenter.org/> (accessed March 2009).

### **4.3. NICHOLAS CAFARDI**

Nicholas Cafardi was probably the most high profile of all of the PCO participants, most of whom were well-educated Catholics over the age of forty. Though the majority were lay people, a handful of nuns and retired priests also attended meetings and participated in events like phone banking and de-pamphleting RNC fliers from parish parking lots.

Cafardi grew up in Pittsburgh in the 1950's and 60's. A member of what he described as a devout Catholic family, he served as an altar boy for most of his childhood and attended Catholic Schools. In my interview with him he said that his family was not well off and that they were part of the "poor side of the parish." His father was a carpenter and the children were sent to the parish school, which integrated the well-off Catholic children, who lived "above 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue," with the poorer ones, who lived "below 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue." As a result, Cafardi went to school with the sons of both carpenters and lawyers.

Cafardi decided in high school that he was going to become a priest. He entered a Pittsburgh seminary, attended Duquesne University, and was then sent to a seminary in Rome to finish his final two undergraduate years. His actual undergraduate degree is from The Gregorian University, a Jesuit institution in Rome. Cafardi stayed in a seminary in Rome for one year after getting his B.A. before coming to the conclusion that he could not make the necessary sacrifices to join the Priesthood. So he returned to Pittsburgh with a B.A. in Philosophy and received his Masters in the subject from Duquesne soon afterwards. He was then accepted into the Ph.D. program in Philosophy at the University, but eventually decided to change tracks and get a degree in Law instead.

During the time of his upbringing, Cafardi recalled, “it was very logical to be Catholic and Democrat.”<sup>214</sup> His father was “a union guy” and according to Cafardi, “being Catholic and Democrat (during that period) was the same thing.” After all, the Church in the United States, he said, had always been “the voice of the working-man.” During this point in our interview Cafardi recalled the figure of Charles Owen Rice, a famous 1930’s Pittsburgh labor priest who centered his work on fighting to establish a minimum wage law and for other workers rights. He also mentioned that his father, a carpenter, was an active union member. “But then,” he said, “along came Roe in 1973.”

Cafardi noted that after Roe was decided, the Democrats were not great supporters of it. For example, he noted, Ted Kennedy was at first a critic of the decision. But, he continued, “very swiftly the Republicans decided it would be a great wedge issue and began to take full advantage of it.” Consequently, Cafardi, in presidential elections, began to vote Republican. Cafardi said he voted for Republican presidential candidates from the Roe decision onwards because he thought that “they *were* going to do something (about it).” “And then it hit me, guess what? They have absolutely no intention of doing anything about this,” he said. “They talk the talk but I don’t think they walk the walk.”

In our interview, Cafardi advanced an original and highly nuanced analysis of the politics of attempting to deal with the problems of Roe v. Wade through legal channels. For Cafardi, the project of “overturning” Roe v. Wade had now become an empty victory. He argued that,

As great a victory as it would be if Roe were overturned, it would only be a symbolic victory. I mean overturning Roe isn’t going to make abortions go away. All it really would do is return it to the states. Some states would say it’s okay, some states would not. Most would say it’s okay. It would be legal in many more states than it would be illegal. Because you look at the polls, huh? I mean even in a place as conservative as South Dakota’s suppose to be, people there on election

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<sup>214</sup> Nicholas Cafardi (Dean, Duquesne University Law School), in discussion with the author, February 2009.

day voted down a referendum that would have been pretty strict abortion control. So even in a conservative state like that it won't get support.<sup>215</sup>

If, in Cafardi's analysis, the legal route will not produce change, then the conclusion for Catholics like him is that a new path must be found to deal with the question of abortion. "So I really came to the conclusion that addressing Roe as a truly legal issue was a huge mistake because I didn't see a good legal solution to it," he said.

If the Republican Party was serious about stopping abortions in the U.S., Cafardi contends, the best way to achieve this goal would be to pass a Human Life Amendment. "If we were really serious, we have to rewrite the constitution because as you know, Roe v. Wade interprets the Constitution," he said. During the Reagan and Bush years, when the Republican Party controlled the Presidency and both houses of Congress, the Human Life Amendment, proposed in multiple forms, made it only once to committee, and it was never brought to a vote on either the Senate or House floors. The Hogan Amendment, proposed in 1973, states that "Neither the United States nor any State shall deprive any human being, from the moment of conception, of life without due process of law; nor deny to any human being, from the moment of conception, within its jurisdiction, the equal protection of the laws."

Cafardi speaks for many members of PCO when he says, "I'm tired of my faith being used as a wedge issue." In this statement, one detects a sense of betrayal and disillusionment on the part of these Catholic voters who had voted Republican, enticed by the promise of overturning Roe, a promise that had begun to fade as the years passed and nothing happened. In response to Catholics who argue that only one more conservative justice is needed on the Supreme Court in order to overturn the Roe decision, Cafardi points to what happened with Justice Anthony Kennedy. Kennedy was appointed by Reagan. It was hoped that when cases

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<sup>215</sup> Nicholas Cafardi, in discussion with the author, February 2009.

dealing with the matter of abortion would come up in front of the court, he would rule in a manner consistent with Reagan's "pro-life" platform. Instead, he sided in favor of Planned Parenthood in the 1993 case of *Casey v. Planned Parenthood*, which upheld the *Roe* decision.

Having put aside the idea of dismantling *Roe v. Wade* by way of the law, Cafardi argues that it is better to have a president who, while he cannot legislate, can sign executive orders that have immediate effects in changing reality.

I further saw that a President isn't going to have a whole lot of effect on abortion. He or she just doesn't really, as long as the law is what it is. The president can't change that. The Court can change it and the president can change it through appointments to the Court, but that's a pretty attenuated process. Whereas the President can directly stop the war in Iraq. The President can directly provide assistance to the poor in New Orleans. The President can directly try and help the poor – the 4 million people we've made homeless in Iraq. A president can do that on his own, without anybody else. So I see President Obama as really being able to effect directly pro-life issues and I think I consider abortion to be, you know, not an issue because I didn't see how either president was going to change things.<sup>216</sup>

It would seem that Cafardi also weighed the fact that Obama's unique opening to a search for common ground with religious groups exemplified in sections of his 2006 book, *The Audacity of Hope*, both increased the opportunities for and the pressures on Catholic citizens to enter into a dialogue with his platform. Seeking the votes of religious Americans who found his position on abortion out of line with their overall moral beliefs regarding questions of life and death, Obama actively addressed the issue during the campaign in the hope of finding common ground solutions to reducing the number of abortions performed in the U.S. For example, the Pro-Life-Pro-Obama website created by the Matthew 25 Network, an organization of Christians calling for a new type of political engagement, states that "an Obama administration will do more than a McCain administration for the cause of life, by drastically reducing abortions

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<sup>216</sup> Nicholas Cafardi, in discussion with the author, February 2009.



through giving women and families the support and the tools they need to choose life.” For many participants in PCO, this argument and the promising enactment of its measures provided the best practical solution to the issue for the moment.

An Obama campaign talking points pamphlet entitled, *Catholics for Obama: Standing Up For Faith, Family, and Values*, distributed to PCO by the Obama campaign’s Pennsylvania Catholic Vote Deputy Director, Cody Fischer, lists “abortion” as the third key issue in the seven point pamphlet. Under the heading of abortion the pamphlet states that, “Barack Obama believes that by reducing unintended pregnancies and supporting women and families, we can reduce the need for abortions.”<sup>217</sup> It further briefly discusses Obama’s plan to assist women with pre- and post-natal health care and parenting skills and promote alternatives to abortion such as adoption. “In the end,” the pamphlet reads, “Obama is the only candidate in the race with a plan to reduce the need for abortions, other than criminalization.” The other main points on the pamphlet list deployed rhetorical tropes that resonate within Catholic discourse – “personal responsibility,” “jobs and homeownership,” “healthcare for all,” “tax cuts for working families,” and “a living wage.”

Further, many members of PCO were aware of and considered a document issued by the progressive Catholic group, “Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good,” entitled *Voting for the Common Good: A Practical Guide for Conscientious Catholics*,<sup>218</sup> which cites five key Church documents as its main sources.<sup>219</sup> Besides calling for Catholic voters to make an “informed conscience” the point of departure in considering political choices, this document

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<sup>217</sup> *Catholics for Obama: Standing Up For Faith, Family, and Values* (Pittsburgh, PA: Catholics for Obama Meeting, 2008)

<sup>218</sup> This document was not distributed at PCO meetings, but many members cited their familiarity with it.

<sup>219</sup> The document cites five “key documents used in this guide.” They are the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the Memo from Cardinal Ratzinger to U.S. Catholic Bishops (2004), the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith’s *Doctrinal Note on some questions regarding The Participation of Catholics in Political Life* (2002), the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops’ (USCCB) *Faithful Citizenship, A Catholics Call to Political Responsibility* (2003) and the USCCB’s *Planning Ideas for Parish Staffs and Parish Councils* (2004).

states that Catholic citizens are to consider the entire gamut of issues having to do with the duty to protect the life and dignity of all human beings. It encourages Catholics to “look for the candidate who will do the most in concrete terms to promote the dignity of human life, justice, and peace, and reject ‘Litmus Tests’ that reduce Catholic issues to one or a few issues.”<sup>220</sup> It would seem that the hierarchy of the Catholic Church itself had realized that making electoral choices based on one issue alone was no longer a fruitful strategy for achieving the enactment of policies that acknowledged and supported the Church’s own moral teaching. In this sense, Cafardi’s own search for a strategy that would bring forth the realization of an important set of ethical objectives that included, but were not limited to, the issue of abortion was not that far away from the voter guidelines issued by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops. However, this strategy did not and does not represent the position of many Catholics who chose not to vote for Obama precisely because of his opposition to criminalizing abortion.

In the document the authors also ask Catholics to consider this key question: “What will the candidate do to address affronts to human life and dignity such as poverty, torture, abortion, war, the death penalty, and a lack of freedom and opportunity?”<sup>221</sup> This document provided Catholic citizens with a certain amount of latitude regarding the primacy of the issue of abortion. Further, the document poses this key question in its “Frequently Asked Questions” section: “Is it okay to vote for a “pro-choice candidate?” The response to this question notes that when then-Cardinal Ratzinger was confronted with this question in 2004, he replied that it could be acceptable if “proportionate reasons exist” and the voter is voting on those “proportionate reasons” and not the candidate’s “pro-choice” beliefs. Thus, it is never acceptable to vote for a

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<sup>220</sup> Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good, *Voting for the Common Good: A Practical Guide for Conscientious Catholics* (www.thecatholicalliance.org, [2008]), 12.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid.

candidate *because* of his or her “pro-choice” position. The document continues with commentary and interpretation of the now-Pope’s statement explaining that

Here Cardinal Ratzinger is speaking about prudence. Many “pro-life” candidates talk a good talk on ending abortion but don’t produce results. On the other hand, there are candidates who don’t believe in making abortion illegal, but who support effective measures to promote healthy families and reduce abortions by providing help to pregnant women and young children.<sup>222</sup>

This statement seems to explicate PCO’s primary reasoning for supporting Obama – as Cafardi has stated, he supports him *despite* his “pro-choice” stance. In fact, PCO members often cited the work of “Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good” with reverence at various meetings I attended.

From Cafardi’s analysis of how Catholics, including himself, had gone about trying to overturn the Roe decision in the last thirty years, it is clear that he came to the conclusion that having made this goal the determining factor of their political allegiances had not brought the expected results. In fact, he feels that it had caused the neglect of other crucial issues to their objectives of justice and peace in the U.S. and the world. How they handled the cross pressure brought about by Roe v. Wade is now considered to have been a mistaken path, at least for Cafardi. Recognizing that the political process still offered them a dilemma, PCO chose to try a different path of dealing with their cross pressured situation. I will now report and analyze the position of two PCO members whose political decisions do not appear to be determined by the rift between “pro-life” and “pro-choice” forces.

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid, 9.

#### 4.4 PATRICIA MCCANN

A second prominent member of PCO who served as a key informant for my research is Patricia McCann, a 73-year-old Sister of Mercy at Carlow University in Pittsburgh. McCann attended almost every PCO meeting. She and her fellow Sister, Betsy McMillan were very active in the group, participating in meetings, conference calls and other events such as phone banking for the campaign. McCann even responded to Deputy Director Cody Fischer's call to write opinion editorials and letters to the editor publicly expressing PCO's arguments for supporting Obama. An op-ed by McCann entitled, "What's Wrong With Hope?," was published in the *Pittsburgh Post Gazette* on August 31, 2008. The piece describes McCann's activism in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960's and details her support of Obama, who, she wrote, "has the potential to become the kind of transformative leader who can tap into the best of American culture and enable us to return to the animating values of the founders of this nation. He cares about those who are poor and marginalized."<sup>223</sup>

Patricia McCann joined the Sisters of Mercy community in 1955 at the age of twenty. She grew up in a Catholic family in Bedford, Pennsylvania, a small town in the central part of the state. "It was definitely not a Catholic area," McCann recalled in our interview. "As a matter of fact it was anti-Catholic. I was the only Catholic child in my grade school class the entire way through grade school."<sup>224</sup> Her father was a Pennsylvania State Policeman who was sent to the Bedford area to establish the patrol force for the Pennsylvania Turnpike, which was being built at the time. McCann went to public elementary school in Bedford until around 1945, when her

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<sup>223</sup> Patricia McCann, "What's Wrong With Hope?" *Pittsburgh Post Gazette*, August 31, 2008.

<sup>224</sup> Patricia McCann (Sister of Mercy), in discussion with the author, March 2009.

father was transferred to the barracks at Greensburg, Pennsylvania. It was in Greensburg where McCann began to attend Catholic school at St. Xavier Academy for Girls High School.

When I asked McCann if her family was very religious or if she would describe them as “cultural Catholics,” she replied that the family’s Catholicism was “an every day acknowledgment.” Her parents, she said, were both from very strong Catholic families. “But they were not devotional types,” she recalled. “I mean my father used to speak disparagingly about what he called ‘holy roller religion.’ Neither of them were the type who wore their religion on their shirt-sleeve, but both of them were very firm, Catholic people.”

McCann said that her parents were much more concerned with “the part of Catholicity that addresses social justice issues.” Although the family did place a strong emphasis on personal faith, “it wasn’t a pious kind of religion. (It was) strong on personal faith,” she continued, “and as a consequence of personal faith, being very aware of your neighbor and how you interacted with your neighbor – that kind of thing.” McCann made sure to note that “in those days, many of the issues that we think of as justice issues on the forefront now were not yet on the forefront of people’s consciousness, but you know, just basic – being kind, being honest, having integrity, being fair with people. My dad was very much supportive of labor unions – that kind of thing.”

McCann currently serves as the archivist at the Sisters of Mercy convent at Carlow University. She has taught courses such as “Religion in America,” “The Church in the Modern Period,” “Catholic Social Justice Teaching” and “American Church History” both at Carlow and St. Vincent College in Latrobe, Pennsylvania. McCann said she has always identified as a Democrat, immediately describing her parents’ strong support of the Democratic Party. “In that time period, when they (her parents) were young adults, it was generally the perception that the Democratic Party was the Party of immigrants, and Catholics were generally identified as

immigrants, though my parents were born in this country.” Further, she stated, “the issues that the Democratic Party addressed were the ones that Catholics were in tune with. And so, yes, I always have self-identified as a Democrat.” The strongest amongst these types of issues, McCann identified as “issues of fairness for immigrants and labor issues – the right to unionize.” She went on to note that in some of the areas where her father grew up, a Catholic would not be able to get a job in the public school system or any other aspect of public life “because the anti-Catholicism was so strong.”

When asked about why she supported the candidacy of Barack Obama, McCann broadly stated that she still thinks that the Democratic Party’s political philosophy is closer to her “view of life and the world and what’s good for people” than the Republican party’s political philosophy. She also immediately noted that she was active in the Civil Right Movement – she led a bus of Pittsburgh area college students to the Selma to Montgomery, Alabama March in March of 1965 – and she thought that the country “was ready for that kind of step in terms of racial integration.” When asked to specify how she thought Obama’s positions were in line with her political philosophy, McCann first cited his “strong stance against the Iraq war. That’s the one I was really in harmony with,” she said. Secondly, she said that Obama’s ideas about “leveling the playing field so that the people who were at the bottom rung economically had more opportunity and more of a chance” was also key. In regards to this issue, she expressed that she thought that the policies of the Reagan and Bush administrations resulted in “the rich getting very much richer at the expense of the middle class and the poor.” Thus although she would take issue with some aspects of the Democratic Party’s platform, McCann felt that the Democrats were more in harmony with her in seeking to address those types of inequities.

In my observation of McCann both at PCO meetings and in our interview sessions, the umbrella term “Catholic social justice” consistently reoccurred. When asked to speak on this term and on how she saw her political participation influenced by her Catholic faith, McCann discussed how issues that the Democrats address – the economy, immigration, unemployment, better equity in terms of standards of living, health care, housing – are central to Catholic social teaching as she understands it. “Catholic social teaching,” she said, “is based on the principle of the dignity of every person – the sacredness of every person. And you can’t have dignity for people, you can’t have people free to pursue our God-given gifts if they don’t have economic security and if they don’t have educational opportunity and if they don’t have decent housing for families.” These things, she said, are “bedrock” to the pursuit of Catholic social teaching. Further, she concluded, “in my judgment the more that we have a kind of social safety net that addresses the concerns of the poor, then the more people can live the kinds of lives that God intended for us to have the opportunity to live.”

When I asked McCann to describe how the issue of abortion fits into her moral matrix and if or how it is ranked within Catholic social justice issues, she said that she identifies as “a pro-life person. However,” she continued,

‘Pro-life’ for me does not mean what I see used with that term by so many so-called “pro-life” organizations. ‘Pro-life’ for me has to include the whole gamut of human concerns that make life better for people, born and unborn. And so being a woman, having spent most of my life working in education with women – not all of it, but a lot of it – and having spent a lot of time identifying with people who work with poor women, I am more ready to accept the complexity of the abortion issue than seems sometimes to be the case. Hence, that would not be the number one issue guiding my voting. It never has been and it is not likely ever to be the number one issue that guides my voting. As I said the number one issue that guides my voting is the larger social umbrella.<sup>225</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Patricia McCann, in discussion with the author, March 2009.

McCann went on to say that it is her understanding that the number of abortions decrease as poverty is addressed and vice-versa. Hence, she said, she is much more interested in addressing the complex and wider area of social ills that could create the kind of social and economic environment in which abortion “does not appear to be such a clear choice.” She stressed that she sees many avenues that should be addressed in order to reduce abortions in the U.S. including “women’s health care, day care, (and) addressing the poverty of single parents.” All of these areas are directly related, she said, to “whether or not there is just abortion as an easy answer to deal with pregnancy.” This position would seem to be in harmony with Obama’s own understanding of the social and material measures that would lead to the reduction of abortions. During the final presidential debate with John McCain Obama stated that those on both sides of the issue should come together and say “we should try to prevent unintended pregnancies by providing appropriate education to our youth, communicating that sexuality is sacred and that they should not be engaged in cavalier activity, and providing options for adoption and helping single mothers if they want to choose to keep the baby.”<sup>226</sup>

In concert with Obama’s abortion rights position yet not consistent with the Catholic Church’s position on the absolute evil of abortion, McCann believes that access to abortion, in a health care environment that is safe, is necessary. “Abortion as a solution to dealing with unwanted pregnancies – no. I don’t believe that,” she stated. However, McCann argues that “until we address the whole cultural climate that fosters that, we’ll get nowhere with that issue.” She also makes a point of tying her argument to an interpretation of how the religious voter should act in a pluralistic society like the United States. “It’s one thing to say, ‘I’m morally opposed to abortion,’ which I think is a Catholic principle, yes indeed,” she said. “It’s another

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<sup>226</sup> Julie Rovner, “Advocates Want Bush Abortion Policies Reversed.” *National Public Radio*, December 11, 08, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=97971002> (accessed March 10, 2009).



thing to say, okay, how do you deal with that strategically and politically in a pluralist society, you know? Everybody isn't a Catholic. Everybody isn't adherent to exactly the same moral code." Here she cites the conflicted positions of Catholic politicians like Senator John Kerry, Governor Kathleen Sebelius and Vice President Joe Biden, all of whom, McCann identified as devout Catholics, who to McCann are "nuanced," rather than conflicted. The positions of these Catholic politicians indicate, for McCann, that a destabilization is occurring within the national abortion debate. She said that the existence and prominence of these Catholic Democratic politicians, in addition to her voice and the surge in voices of other Catholic Democrats throughout the 2008 election, indicates to her "a little breakthrough and more space for that conversation to occur."

Here McCann spoke of her alignment with the Kerry, Biden, and Sebelius position on the abortion issue regarding the place it should hold for Catholics in the realm of public political discussion, dialogue and legislation. In this way, she differs from Cafardi, who would like to see Roe overturned, but even if it were overturned, it still would not become the law of the land. "The best prospect is not to make abortion illegal, although I wouldn't mind if it were," said Cafardi. "The best prospect is to make abortion unnecessary – you know, unthinkable." Unlike Cafardi, McCann makes clear in our interview that she thinks that the option to have a safe abortion must be available to women, a position she holds to citing her experiences working with poor women.

## 4.5 MICHAEL DROHAN

The third informant for this study is 70-year-old, Michael Drohan, a short, soft-spoken, unassuming Irishman who wears old clothes that give off the scent of a stuffy closet. During the second meeting of PCO, led by Cody Fischer, the group members once again identified themselves one at a time and provided reasons why they supported Obama's candidacy. Fischer also asked members to talk, if they wished, about their own personal background and how it played a part in their support for Obama. Drohan, a former missionary and priest took his time with this task, slowly explaining, for over five minutes, his well thought-out reasons for concluding that Obama was the best candidate for the Presidency.

In a later interview I conducted with him, Drohan discussed more in depth his reasons for supporting Obama. The last eight years, under the Bush presidency, Drohan articulated, the country has witnessed a "reversal of everything (the country) stood for."<sup>227</sup> He noted that during this period respect for human rights and civil rights eroded and hostility for the U.S. grew exponentially throughout the world due to Bush's "refusal to respect any international law or any international conventions" regarding matters of war, the environment, or human rights. Further, it was clear to Drohan that John McCain would continue the policies of the Bush administration. "Voting for McCain," Drohan said, "was absolutely out of the question. He was such a terrible possibility – a really dangerous individual was the way I saw it, who learned nothing from his own time of being a prisoner of war in Vietnam. He still believed that war was the solution to all problems, just like Cheney and Bush." Drohan said that Obama provided an alternative to the

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<sup>227</sup> Michael Drohan (President of the Board, Thomas Merton Center), in discussion with the author, March 09.

policies put forth by McCain and that it became clear to him that the presidential race was not a race among equals. Further, he said,

It was like a horse among donkeys, you know? Obama stood out as a person who was much more articulate and educated and so on, and knew the issues much better than McCain or indeed Huckabee or any of the other candidates. So to me it was a no-brainer, supporting him.<sup>228</sup>

Reflecting on his participation in PCO during the fall of 2008, Drohan said that he thought the group largely came out of the Second Vatican Council “kind of Church.” He cited the document *Gaudium et Spes* (“Joy and Hope”) which he said instructed that to be a Catholic and a Christian, one had to fully live this identity through the way one lived and behaved in the world. This called for making a commitment to serving the poor, the marginalized, the suffering, and the crucified, he stated. “I’m a preferential option for the poor Catholic. That’s my basic premise.”

Drohan was born in Waterford, Ireland in 1938, into what he calls “a very Catholic family.” He grew up in “a very kind of pre-Vatican II church,” and in his day, many young men entered the seminary. “‘Twas put before people very strongly (entering the seminary) as an option that they should consider and maybe there was quite a bit of guilt laid on as well.” Drohan thus entered the Spiritan Order at the age of eighteen and eventually became a missionary in Kenya, where he worked as a professor of physics at a local university (he holds a Masters in physics). Invited to recall the reasons why he decided to become a missionary in Kenya, Drohan recalled that he “was attracted to going to Africa because of...some idealism of saving Africa or something.” While instructing physics classes, he began to work with area youth (at both the secondary and university level) on how to “live their faith in action.” This work was centered around the goal of improving students’ social consciousnesses, and it was through this work that

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<sup>228</sup> Michael Drohan, in discussion with the author, March 2009.

Drohan became aware of Liberation Theology, a Catholic based theology that emphasizes the need to address the structural sins of society such as war, economic injustice and oppression, through gospel inspired social action, which was emerging out of Latin America during this time period (1960's).

After his time in Kenya, Drohan traveled back to the United Kingdom in order to improve his understanding of why poor countries like Kenya, that are rich in natural resources, are essentially poor. He went on to say that “a lot of people don’t realize that African countries are rich countries—they’re richer in resources than the United States is in natural resources; but they’re poor countries. So that’s not a natural situation. That’s a humanly created situation by colonialism, neo-colonialism and so on—long story.” In England he obtained a Ph.D. in Political Economy, which he planned to use in order to become an advocate for third world countries. Soon after completing his degree, Drohan made his move to Pittsburgh in 1984, taking a job as the Research Director at Duquesne University’s Institute for World Concerns, which is no longer in operation. The Institute was created, says Drohan, to promote “a greater awareness around Pittsburgh and at the University itself about third world issues of poverty, hunger, lack of good health resources.” After leaving Duquesne a few years later, Drohan also left the priesthood, a subject that he did not seem eager to discuss.

Currently, the 70 year-old Drohan defines himself as a “full time activist.” He is currently the President of the Board at The Thomas Merton Center, a non-profit resource and organizing center that focuses on the promotion of peace and justice in the Garfield section of Pittsburgh. In addition to this position, Drohan is part of the Anti-War Committee of Pittsburgh, works with the Palestinian Solidarity Committee of Pittsburgh, and is a participant in Fr. Jack O’Malley’s labor and religion group which brings together labor leaders and church leaders to unite for better

conditions for workers. He and his wife also run the St. James Peace and Justice Committee and the St. James affiliated Haiti Solidarity Committee. Finally, Drohan works with Northside United, “a campaign dedicated to ensuring that the development on the North shore of Pittsburgh benefits the Northside neighborhoods adjacent to the development.”<sup>229</sup> Of his involvement in these various groups, Drohan says, “the list goes on of kind of causes where one can be and should be involved. So, anyhow, I don’t have enough time to do all I should be doing for peace and social justice.”

Although his support for Obama is due largely to the alignment of his beliefs on Catholic Social Teaching with Obama’s positions on the Iraq war, health care, tax breaks for working families, and so on, much of our interview became dominated by the question of abortion, demonstrating the complexity of the issue and its significance to the group’s positions and identity. Drohan shares Cafardi’s belief that the Republican position on abortion is a hypocritical one, in that the Party has adopted the “Pro-Life” position for political reasons alone and they have no intention of actually enacting legislation to make abortions illegal. In our interview, he cited Cafardi’s position more than once indicating that his own reasoning on the issue had been influenced by Cafardi’s arguments.

I’m going by what Nick Cafardi has said, that if you want to really reduce abortions, your best bet is to support the Democratic position and not the Republican one because at least the Democrats can possibly pass legislation which will make the conditions that lead to many women wanting abortion to not have to go that way.<sup>230</sup>

That said, Drohan’s understanding on the question of abortion is a bit muddy, at least from a Catholic perspective. He does not believe that human life begins at conception and stated that because he is a man, he “is a little bit agnostic on the entire question.” Further, Drohan expressed

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<sup>229</sup> Northside United Website Home, <http://www.pittsburghunited.org/campaigns/northside-united> (accessed April 17, 2009).

<sup>230</sup> Michael Drohan, in discussion with the author, March 2009.

that he did not think he could be “dogmatic on this.” Some people, he said, do not believe that abortion is killing a human being. “And I don’t believe they are bad people. They are just people who are honest,” he said. Drohan was then quick to articulate that he does not agree with “those who believe that sex is just a bodily function – like you have to go to the toilet, you have to have to have sex. I believe, myself, that sex is a sacred thing.”

Entangled in Drohan’s understanding of his own Catholicism is a rhetoric expressing his awareness of others who have different beliefs from his own. Because he is uncertain about both the scientific as well as the theological grounds for when the fetus becomes a human being, he appears to feel reluctant to press his beliefs upon others who might be equally uncertain or hold opinion to the contrary. By taking this stance, he departs considerably from the Church’s established doctrine on the issue. Early on in his discussion of abortion, Drohan noted that the medieval theologians believed that the male sperm was already a human life and that in order to bring it into the world, it simply had to be inserted into the woman, who would allow it to grow and be born.

“They had no understanding of the process of fertilization and the contribution of the man and the woman – of the egg and the sperm, how they united. I mean their theology then couldn’t be expected to be very well grounded when it comes to talking about the origins of life.”<sup>231</sup>

While this is one of the most common criticisms mustered by secularism against the Church, that in this and many other instances their science was off, Drohan seems to find comfort for his belief in the uncertainty of when the fetus should be accorded the status of a human being. The question is not whether the fertilized egg is not the incipient, but whether it is a human being in the eyes of the law.

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<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

It is interesting to note that each PCO informant emphasizes a different aspect of the question of abortion and also puts forth slightly different reasons for their strong support of Obama. If we focus on the theological, scientific, and legal status of the fetus, we find McCann and Cafardi stating that abortion is wrong, and Drohan indicating his uncertainty, making him unprepared to state in an absolute way that abortion is immoral and should therefore be prohibited. McCann switches from thinking about the theological, scientific and legal status of the fetus to the dilemma of the pregnant woman. When the pregnant woman becomes the focus of the situation, McCann holds that safe abortions have to be legal. However all three coincide on the nature and importance of their understanding of Catholic social teachings, which they see as the foundation for a more just society, one in which even the question of abortion can be readdressed and if not eliminated, be drastically reduced through the equivalent of a cultural revolution. In Obama's words,

Surely there is some common ground when both those who believe in choice and those who are opposed to abortion can come together and say 'we should try to prevent unintended pregnancies.' By providing appropriate education to our youth, communicating that sexuality is sacred and that they should not be engaged in cavalier activity. And provide options for adoption and helping single mothers if they want to choose to keep the baby. Those are all things that we have put in the Democratic platform for the first time this year and I think that's where we can find some common ground. Because nobody's pro-abortion. I think it's always a tragedy and we should try to reduce these circumstances.<sup>232</sup>

The cross pressures that afflict the difficult choices faced by PCO could be ameliorated or even eliminated if there appeared a public space in which as McCann says, "a conversation can occur." It is this opening within the public realm of dialogue and debate that PCO and Catholics who supported Obama outside the Pittsburgh area successfully created and stepped into by making various interventions into the public square, where their voice had not been prominently registered during the last decade.

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<sup>232</sup> Presidential debate between John McCain and Barack Obama, Hofstra University, October 15, 2008.

#### 4.5. ORGANIZATION AND ACTION: CARVING OUT A SPACE IN THE DEBATE

In his first email to potential Pennsylvania Catholic Obama supporters, Pennsylvania Catholic Vote Director for the Obama campaign, John Kelly, wrote in late August that, “every election cycle for years, Republicans have been using our Catholic faith as a wedge to divide us as a community and as a country in order to win elections.”<sup>233</sup> This, he continued, has resulted in eight years of “increased struggle for working families,” soaring gas prices, massive debt for future generations, an unjust and unnecessary war and the destruction of the environment. In an urgent but motivational tone, Kelly then told his recipients that a “highly funded Republican effort” is gearing up to aim the same kind of persuasion campaign at Pennsylvania Catholics through “dishonest voter guides” and “manipulative ads.” The election will be close, he continued, and there are many undecided Catholics in western Pennsylvania. Kelly next employed the words of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) in their document, “Faithful Citizenship,” writing that the Bishops teach Catholics that “responsible citizenship is a virtue and participation in political life is a moral obligation.”<sup>234</sup> He then stated to these email recipients that he hopes they will identify the criticalness of this election “for you, your community, our nation, and the world,” and that this discernment would prompt them to join in his organization’s efforts. Kelly ended with an invitation to attend the first organizational meeting that would launch the Catholic vote efforts for the Obama campaign in various locations

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<sup>233</sup> John Kelly, email message to author, August 20, 2008.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.



across the state of Pennsylvania. Eight locations were listed, including meetings in Bucks County and North East Philadelphia, Delaware County, Montgomery County, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Scranton (the hometown of the soon-to-be Democratic Vice Presidential nominee Joe Biden) and Wilkes-Barre.

This email prompted the meeting of a couple dozen Pittsburgh Catholics on August 23, 2008 in the conference room of a downtown law office. Kelly led the meeting, laying out the goals of the Catholics for Obama organizational effort and allowing for the introduction of attendees along with a short discussion of the reasons why each participant supported Obama. At the end of the short meeting, immediate tasks were assigned in a general fashion to the group and sent in a follow-up email to the group by Kevin Hayes, an architect and meeting participant. The first general assignment instructed PCO participants to identify Catholics they knew and to invite them to be part of their “committee,” or at least to join the email distribution list.

The second and last assignment that Hayes included in his email encouraged participants to consider if they would be willing to hold a workshop on the USCCB document, “Faithful Citizenship” in their parish. “As we discussed on Saturday,” he wrote, “this might be worth doing in parishes across the diocese in October to counter some of the single-issue emphasis on abortion that will be occurring.”<sup>235</sup> Here Hayes included a link to the “Faithful Citizenship” website which focuses on ideas for said workshops.<sup>236</sup> He closed the email calling for meeting participants to reach out to African American Catholics and to remember to watch Pennsylvania Senator Bob Casey, a Catholic Democrat, speak at the Democratic National Convention that evening.

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<sup>235</sup> Kevin Hayes, email message to author, August 26, 2008.

<sup>236</sup> USCCB Publishing and Catholic Communication Campaign, “Planning Ideas for Parish Staffs and Parish Councils,” Faithful Citizenship, <http://www.faithfulcitizenship.org/parish/planning> (accessed September 2008).

Over the course of the next three months, leadership of the Pittsburgh Catholics for Obama chapter was transferred to Deputy Director Cody Fischer, a twenty-four year old graduate of St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota.<sup>237</sup> During the second meeting of the group, the first meeting led by Fischer, the recent college graduate described how part of the reason why he supported Obama was because he was constantly picked on and bullied as a child, and because he watched his mother, who was single for most of his upbringing, struggle to keep a job and provide the family with the basic necessities for a middle class life, including medical care and coverage. Fischer said he saw Obama as a public servant dedicated and interested in fighting for "the underdog," specifically members of society who were less fortunate. During his college career Fischer worked as an intern in the government relations branch of CentraCare Health System. Shortly after graduating in 2007, he became a Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellow at the Greater Pittsburgh Community Food Bank, where he collaborated with staff to restructure and expand a program that sought to increase access to produce in low-income communities. Before joining the Obama campaign, he engaged in media and message training for Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good, an influential resource for PCO.

For the duration of the fall campaign, Fischer organized and executed PCO meetings at the downtown law office that consisted of regrouping, reconnecting, and discussing past and future efforts to both persuade Catholics to vote for Obama and to insert a "Catholics for Obama" presence into both local and national media. He emailed the group often to remind them of upcoming local events, provide them with links to nationally known Catholic intellectuals and others who published opinion pieces in the national press in support of Obama, and to encourage PCO members to write and submit both letters to the editor and editorials to the Pittsburgh Post

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<sup>237</sup> St. Johns University is a liberal arts college rooted in the Benedictine tradition.

Gazette. In an email sent in early September, Fischer notified PCO members of an upcoming meeting entitled, “Persuasion Program Training and Strategy Session,” praised Sr. Patricia McCann on placing her editorial in the Post Gazette, and provided a link to an article in *Catholic News* on Senator Casey’s campaigning for Obama in which the Senator urged Catholics not to vote on one issue alone. He further provided the link to an article in the September edition of National Catholic Reporter entitled, “Criminalizing versus reducing: The abortion debate continues,” and a recent New York Times question and answer piece featuring constitutional law scholar and former head of the Office of Legal Counsel for Presidents Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, Douglas Kmiec on why, as a Catholic, he supported Obama.

Response to Kelly and Fischer’s call to action was both energetic and promising. Sisters McCann and MacMillan twice volunteered to work in an Obama phone banking effort at both the Catholic and secular levels. On September 7, 2008, Carnegie Mellon graduate student and PCO member Kari Lundgren published an editorial entitled, “My Catholic Faith Pushes Me to Obama,” in the popular liberal online newspaper and blog, *The Huffington Post*. Her article, published on the website’s “Off the Bus” section, which featured articles and posts by ordinary citizens, is one of a few pieces posted about the Catholic vote which prompted the Post to send out mass emails to their online readership announcing that Catholic voters were “up for grabs.” Later that month, Nicholas Cafardi published a piece in the National Catholic Reporter entitled, “I’m a Catholic, staunchly anti-abortion, and support Obama.” This piece was a shortened version of a lengthy paper Cafardi wrote on the subject, rooted in cannon law, entitled “Barack Obama: A Moral Choice for Catholics,” which he planned to deliver at the Sisters of Mercy Campus on October 1, 2008 but was unable to do so due to a family emergency. The paper was hence delivered by Sr. McCann. It should be noted that many people affiliated with the

conservative Catholic institution, Franciscan University of Steubenville attended this event and voiced their opposition to Cafardi's stance during the audience response portion of the event. Two days after this event, which took place on October 1, 2008, Cafardi resigned from his position on the University's board of trustees.

Late in September, Fischer notified PCO members in an email that the organization was now moving to organize Catholics for Obama activities by "region" and had delegated coordinators to take charge of events and activities from that point on. Fischer identified field representatives in East Liberty, Monroeville, Oakland and the larger Pittsburgh office on Smithfield Street. Included in this email was a "Catholic Starter Kit," which contained a short letter to each Catholic for Obama regional Captain. "Senator Obama is a committed Christian and began his career by working with Catholic parishes and other faith communities in struggling neighborhoods on the south side of Chicago," the letter states.

He has continued to show a deep commitment to the Gospel mandate to care for one another and especially the least of these in his pledge to make quality healthcare affordable for all Americans, work for a living wage, protect homeownership, and cut domestic poverty in half in 10 years—positions in line with Catholic Charities USA.

Fischer's regular emails, which often included bullet points of "this week's actions," seemed to keep participants, many of whom did not encounter each other on a daily or weekly basis in everyday life, motivated and engaged in the proposed collective and individual actions.

The leadership team of PCO also scheduled several larger area events with the goal of spreading the group's message and attracting Catholic Obama supporters. In October, Pennsylvania Catholics for Obama hosted a public reception with prominent Catholic Kathleen Kennedy Townsend at Finnegan's Wake Irish Pub on the North Shore. Douglas Kmiec discussed his support of Obama at The Union Project Great Hall in the Highland Park neighborhood of

Pittsburgh in an event entitled, “Catholics for Obama-Biden Faith Forum featuring Douglas Kmiec.” In addition to these events headlined by nationally prominent Catholics, PCO held various “Get Out The Vote Organizational Meetings” in multiple Pittsburgh neighborhoods. These meetings were stressed as the most important part of the campaign strategy and participants were encouraged to attend.

The above description of the number and types of events and activities that PCO organized, attended to, and engaged in, shows that there were a number of different points of convergence between their political activity of the group on the ground, and their various discursive activities in trying to find the possibilities by which they could participate as Catholics in the public sphere. In this sense, they created a space for themselves within both the local and national political landscape, and acted on this newly created space through a specific form of grassroots organization designed with specific objectives. The campaign’s “Catholics for Obama” team dispersed its leadership into the Pittsburgh community, successfully recruited participants and agents to disseminate a pro-Obama message, and then intermittently removed itself, at least physically, from the action that they set to transpire. In effect they organized the agents, gave the participants the tools with which to disseminate the shared message, and directed these agents toward both participating in and creating the events and activities that would garner their candidate votes. They thus created both a territorial and virtual community through meetings, events and a relentless email campaign that kept participants focused and energized on the task at hand. These emails, coupled with on-the-ground organizational opportunities, worked simultaneously to remind participants that they had a common purpose with both the community of Catholic voters and with the community of Obama supporters that could foster the change they sought.

After the election, the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life published the results of a survey that revealed that Obama won the Catholic vote by nine percentage points – 54 percent to McCain’s 45 percent. These election results serve as the best evidence that the Obama campaign’s project of Catholics for Obama yielded the results that it hoped for. The Pew Forum’s analysis of these results, entitled, “How the Faithful Voted,” notes that “President-elect Barack Obama made a concerted effort to reach out to people of faith during the 2008 presidential campaign, and early exit polls show that this outreach may have paid off on Election Day.”<sup>238</sup> In fact, Obama “received equal or higher levels of support” compared with John Kerry, the Democratic presidential candidate in 2004, who lost the Catholic vote to Bush by six percentage points. Beyond helping Obama win the election, progressive Catholics who chose to add their voices to the public political debates of the presidential election were indeed more than pleased with the results that they obtained, as many felt that they had finally been heard and sent a message to both the Republicans and the Democrats about their perspectives on current political issues and the on solutions they expect politicians to implement.

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<sup>238</sup> Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, “How the Faithful Voted,” <http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=367> (accessed December 2008).

## 5.0 CONCLUSIONS: FORGING A NEW SPACE FOR DEBATE

### 5.1 THE COMMON GOOD

In his book, *The Common Good and Christian Ethics* (2002), David Hollenbach argues that in a pluralistic society such as the U.S., the pursuit of the common good should be an essential component of “Christian religious self-understanding” and that in such a context, Christians must actively engage in creating a community of freedom with each other as well as non-Christians.<sup>239</sup> “One does not have to choose between promotion of a strong understanding of the civic good and full commitment to Christian faith,” he writes. “The two are essentially related.”<sup>240</sup> Seemingly in agreement with Connolly’s arguments in *Why I am Not a Secularist*, Hollenbach writes that in order to achieve a “community of mutual freedom and solidarity,” in which all groups are able to dialogue with each other in the public square, several conditions must be met.<sup>241</sup> The first condition regards the normative secular understanding of the place of religion in the public square. “If a secular understanding of the public role of religion makes demands that Christians cannot accept on their own terms, Christians will not be able to accept these demands,” he writes.<sup>242</sup> Thus, the issue of whether a “public role for Christianity is

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<sup>239</sup> Hollenbach, 113.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid, 114.

possible that could be affirmed by secular and non-Christian thinkers” must be addressed. “In other words,” he writes, “that the claim that a free society is a thoroughly secularized society must be challenged.”<sup>243</sup>

Hollenbach’s contention speaks to the question of whether PCO found or created a space in the public sphere for their Catholic informed consciences to be voiced within the presidential political debates, or whether they were merely another example of “Catholic capitulation to the American way of life.”<sup>244</sup> In this thesis I have contended that PCO is a novel example of the former, especially in regards to the Democratic Party. However, it should be noted that its efforts to support Obama’s candidacy did not come together entirely on their own. On the contrary, the group was essentially formed because the Obama campaign sought to create a grassroots political group defined by its religious affiliation in “Catholics for Obama.”

In fact, as was briefly discussed earlier, Obama, acting to some degree out of step with his Party’s own leaders and many of its passionate constituents in regards to the role of religion in the public square (that religion is a private matter and that neither public servants nor citizens are to impose their beliefs onto others or to express them in public political terms), welcomed religious individuals and groups into a dialogue with his campaign. Further, he did not urge them to translate their beliefs into secular language. Rather, he stressed that he was willing to work with religious groups in order to find common ground, a resilient theme of his campaign that was noted frequently by Douglas Kmiec in his arguments of support for the candidate. In his book *The Audacity of Hope*, Obama acknowledges that “religion is rarely practiced in isolation.”<sup>245</sup> Further, he concedes that when religiously motivated groups organize and express that the

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<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

<sup>244</sup> Kane, 13.

<sup>245</sup> Barack Obama, *The Audacity of Hope* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2006), 213.



secular state advances values that go against their belief system, “liberals get nervous.”<sup>246</sup> But, Obama continues, such strategies of avoidance (on the part of liberals) “make a mistake when we fail to acknowledge the power of faith in the lives of the American people, and so avoid joining a serious debate about how to reconcile faith with our modern, pluralistic democracy.”<sup>247</sup> Further, he writes that

There are a whole lot of religious people in America, including the majority of Democrats. When we abandon the field of religious discourse...when we discuss religion only in the negative sense of where or how it should not be practiced, rather than in the positive sense of what it tells us about our obligations toward one another; when we shy away from religious venues and religious broadcasts because we assume that we will be unwelcome – others fill the vacuum.<sup>248</sup>

In this quote, Obama seems to be speaking directly to his Party as a whole, arguing, like Connolly, that their stance on religion’s place in the public sphere is not only rigid and restrictive for the workings of a pluralistic democracy, but is also costing them votes. Whether he is aware of the current debates on secularism or not, Obama seems to echo the thoughts of theorists such as Casanova, Connolly and Taylor in their contentions that exclusivist secularism has fallen short of meeting the practical and spiritual needs of modern society.

Thus, Obama does not seem to be an exclusivist secularist, a position that PCO members acknowledged and appreciated. In fact, in his book, *The Catholic Case for Obama*, Catholic Democrats founder Patrick Whelan discusses Obama’s deep acquaintance with twentieth century Catholic political thought. Whelan quotes Obama (in an October 2008 interview with *Catholic Digest*) as stating that the beginning period of his community organizing work in Chicago involved working very closely with Catholic parishes on Chicago’s South Side whose communities had declined due to closing steel plants. “The Campaign for Human Development

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid.

<sup>247</sup> Ibid, 214.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid.

helped fund the project,” Obama stated, “and so very early on, my career was intertwined with the belief in social justice that is so strong in the Church,” as quoted by Whelan.<sup>249</sup> Years later, when Obama had become an Illinois state legislator, he became very friendly with Cardinal Bernardin, a powerful and influential figure in the American Catholic Church, who authored the Bishops’ Peace Pastoral and created the “Common Ground Project.”<sup>250</sup> He also served as the first General Secretary of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops (now the USCCB) and was “instrumental in shaping the Catholic Church in the United States according to the vision of the Second Vatican Council.”<sup>251</sup> In his text Whelan cites Obama in another October 2008 interview stating,

I’ve tried to apply the precepts of compassion and care for the vulnerable that are so central to Catholic teachings to my work, [such as in] making health care a right for all Americans — I was the sponsor in the state legislature for the Bernardin Amendment, named after Cardinal Bernardin, a wonderful figure in Chicago I had the opportunity to work with who said that health care should be a right.<sup>252</sup>

Whelan also notes that Obama’s community organizing mentor Gerald Kellman said that Obama was sometimes attacked for his affiliation with the Church in his early community organizing work as being “a tool of the Catholics.”<sup>253</sup> “His education as a community organizer was shaped

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<sup>249</sup> Patrick Whelan, *The Catholic Case For Obama*, A PDF book available on the Catholic Democrats website, (Boston, MA: Catholic Democrats, 2008), 9.

<sup>250</sup> According to the National Pastoral Life Center, “the Catholic Common Ground Initiative was inaugurated by the late Cardinal Joseph Bernardin with the release of a statement, ‘Called to Be Catholic: Church in a Time of Peril,’ on August 12, 1996. It originated in a concern that unnecessarily polarizing differences among church leaders and members hinder efforts to build the church community and to carry out its mission. The statement proposes working principles for dialogue within the church and expresses the conviction that such an effort will transform those who engage in it as well as strengthen the church for its mission in the new millennium.” See National Pastoral Life Center, “What is the Catholic Common Ground Initiative?” <http://www.nplc.org/commonground/about.php> (accessed April 17, 2009).

<sup>251</sup> Archdiocese of Chicago’s Joseph Cardinal Bernardin Archives and Records Center, “Biography of Joseph Cardinal Bernardin,” <http://archives.archchicago.org/jcbbio.htm> (accessed March 2009).

<sup>252</sup> Whelan, 11.

<sup>253</sup> Whelan, 11.

by the Catholic Church,” Kellman stated. “Each meeting began and ended with prayer.”<sup>254</sup>

In his book, Whelan effectively demonstrates that Obama seems to have been greatly influenced by his experiences with Catholicism, especially in regards to Catholic social teaching, which he tries to put to use in his own work. Moreover, his use of social justice language and rhetoric in his campaign and consistent reiteration of the need to find common ground seemed to reach and resound with much of the Catholic population, who voted overwhelmingly for him over Republican John McCain. It is clear that Obama’s outreach to people of faith was not simply a political calculation to garnish the necessary votes to win the election. Rather, his experience as a community organizer working with Catholic churches for common goals taught him the lesson that the possibility of finding common ground with people whose ethical matrix came from a religious foundation was not an unattainable goal, but indeed a possibility worthy of undertaking. Thus, it is not surprising that it was the Obama campaign that imagined the possibility of creating “Catholics for Obama” and other similar religiously based political networks.

In relation to Catholic Action, lay groups of the 1940’s, 50’s and 60’s that sought to transform society by penetrating the spirit of the gospels into action, PCO seems to both share essential characteristics with these groups and diverge from their models of faith-based social action as well. For example, the Christian Family Movement, which emerged in the Midwest in the mid-1940’s and later became an international movement in the early 1960’s, based its core teachings on the Cardijn<sup>255</sup> “see, judge, act” method of engaging with one’s environment in light

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<sup>254</sup> Whelan, 12.

<sup>255</sup> Cardinal Joseph Cardijn (1882-1967) was a Belgian priest who became outraged by the religious alienation he noticed in European workers. He sought to bring them back to the church by integrating its teachings into the everyday lives of workers. Cardijn described religion as a “whole life, which, like the host, should be consecrated to God,” and founded the Young Christian Workers movement after World War I with the hope of “Christianizing”

of the gospels with the final intention to act “in a concrete way to bring the environment more in line with the gospels.”<sup>256</sup> Cardijn’s method involved empirical study and assessment, theological inquiry and reflection and concrete action in the world.<sup>257</sup> Its ultimate goal was to “Christianize” secular life. Cardijn’s method was brought to the States in the late 1930’s and quickly became popular in the both the Christian Family Movement and the Young Christian Students Movement.

While PCO believes that the Catholic vision of the common good is beneficial to all Americans and that Catholics should engage with the world socially and politically in order to help bring about peace and justice, the group neither sought to “Christianize” secular life, nor did they engage in scriptural and theological study as a group. Unlike the Cardijn-inspired Catholic Action groups of the early to mid-twentieth century, PCO entered its meetings having already assessed the empirical situation of the country and its then president George W. Bush in their own lives. Perhaps their group was founded in the third stage of the Cardijn method, which called for action that would bring about a change in the environment, making it more in concert with the gospels. It is also significant to note that in relation to the positions of Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, founders of the Catholic Worker movement in the 1930’s, PCO shares the interests of protecting the rights of workers, caring for the poor and working for peace, but diverges from Day and Maurin’s distrust of the modern state and their feeling that it was unable “to serve human needs.”<sup>258</sup> In contrast, following Pope Leo XIII’s assertion in his 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (On the Condition of Labor) that “serving the needs of all citizens is not only a duty of

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secular life in both its individual and social elements. See Clair E. Wolfteich, *American Catholics Through the Twentieth Century: Spirituality, Lay Experience and Public Life*, (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2001), 40-41.

<sup>256</sup> Wolfteich, 40.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> Wolfteich, 32.

government but the very reason for government's existence,"<sup>259</sup> PCO obviously sees the need for governmental action in promoting the common good.

PCO participant Michal Drohan may have articulated the group's most notable received tradition when he identified its members as Vatican II "kind of Catholics," who, rather than seeking the goal of "Christianizing" American life and society through faith-based action, fought for the election of a candidate they believed to be most in line with Catholic social justice teaching and did so while respecting the plurality of religious and secular positions that make up the American public. Although this position on religious freedom was shared by Dorothy Day, who "critiqued the church for its failure to truly embrace pluralism,"<sup>260</sup> this distinction became a critical part of Catholic doctrine in the 1960's through Jesuit John Courtney Murray's influence on the Second Vatican Council. Murray is often credited with orchestrating the "Americanization of Roman Catholic thinking on religious freedom and pluralism"<sup>261</sup> with his critical book, *We Hold These Truths* (1960). His arguments for religious liberty and the separation of church and state first caused concern among the church hierarchy but eventually gained favor and molded the teachings of the Second Vatican Council and most specifically, the Council's "Declaration on Religious Freedom" (*Dignitatis Humanae*), "which asserted that both believers and nonbelievers had a right to religious liberty."<sup>262</sup> From the brief narrative provided above, it is clear that PCO is one more instance in a rich tradition of Catholic activism.

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<sup>259</sup> Korzen and Kelley, 30.

<sup>260</sup> Wolfeich, 35.

<sup>261</sup> Wolfeich, 56.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid.

## 5.2 REARRANGING LOCATIONS

In the voters guide created by “Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good” entitled, *Voting for the Common Good: A Practical Guide for Conscientious Catholics*, the authors state three key principles for Catholic voting. The first is to inform one’s conscience. The second is to apply prudence. The third and final principle is to vote the common good.<sup>263</sup> “A culture of the common good,” the document states, “provides for the health, welfare, and dignity of all people, and promotes the best interests of everyone, not just the few.”<sup>264</sup> It also places helping those most in need – the poor and vulnerable – at the center of its directive. This notion of working for the common good, which is central to Catholic social teaching, was praised and embraced by PCO. Moreover, as I have discussed, it was embraced by now-President Obama during his campaign and seemingly throughout his life as a public servant. It also addresses the arguments made especially by Connolly for finding a public space of engagement oriented toward the discovery of what he calls “the fullness of being.” This pamphlet is a shorthand and practical statement on the common good, which notes that the modern notion of the common good has seen its development in the thinking of the Catholic Church throughout the twentieth century.

In the sixth chapter of his book entitled, “Intellectual Solidarity,” Hollenbach discusses how Christians should bring their vision of the good life into the public square “in a spirit of

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<sup>263</sup> Hollenbach, in his chapter, “Christianity in a Community of Freedom,” traces back the idea of the possibility of discerning a civic common good to Augustine’s *The City of God*. “The only absolute is God, with whom human beings enter into full relationship only in the heavenly Jerusalem, the City of God. But the political domain has the potential to become a partial embodiment of the full human good. This potential points to a form of politics that seeks greater human solidarity, not just toleration or the protection of individuals and their solitude. This will be the politics that seeks the common good in freedom – the common good or a community of freedom. Such a politics must be supported and sustained by a culture that values both freedom and solidarity, that sees solidarity as a prerequisite for shared freedom, and that sees solidarity as a prerequisite for shared freedom, and that sees freedom as self-rule as possible only in common action with others” (136).

<sup>264</sup> “Catholics in Alliance for the Common Good,” *Voting for the Common Good: A Practical Guide for Conscientious Catholics* (2008).

solidarity with their non-Christian fellow citizens.”<sup>265</sup> He writes that because a religiously pluralistic society, by definition, does not share a common vision of the good life, it must undertake the project of moving toward such a common vision. This undertaking, he writes, should be done through what he calls, “intellectual solidarity,” an intellectual endeavor that calls for “serious thinking by citizens about what their distinctive understandings of the good imply for the life of a society made up of people with many different traditions.”<sup>266</sup> The reason why he calls it solidarity is because it can only achieve success if it insists on mutual listening and “speaking across the boundaries of religion and culture.”<sup>267</sup> Moreover, it must continue to operate and seek the common good even when disagreement persists. Thus, “intellectual solidarity,” writes Hollenbach, describes “an orientation of mind that regards differences among traditions as stimuli to intellectual engagement across religious and cultural boundaries.”<sup>268</sup>

Hollenbach’s arguments are primarily a response to the dominant idea, one which came out of the wars of religion in early modern Europe, that the most effective way to protect freedom is through “strategies and institutions that encourage people to leave each other alone.”<sup>269</sup> Citing Rawls as an example of this position, Hollenbach insists that this notion of “the method of avoidance,” which suggests that in a pluralistic society religious, philosophical, or moral views are neither affirmed, denied or given status value, is both dangerous and harmful to the increasingly integrated and globalized world in which we now live. “Avoiding disputed values may keep the peace for a while, and it may protect a solidarity form of freedom for a time,” writes Hollenbach. “But when living in non-intersecting parallel worlds is not a realistic

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<sup>265</sup> Hollenbach, 137.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid, 138.

<sup>269</sup> Ibid, 139.

possibility, it is not enough.”<sup>270</sup> Hollenbach thus calls for what he terms a “deliberative democracy,” which begins from the position that citizens hold different moral convictions about various public issues due to their varied religious and philosophical visions of the good life.<sup>271</sup> But “deliberative democracy” contends that interacting with fellow citizens from the premise that we all must “coexist” without engaging one another is no longer the best way of keeping the peace. Thus, rather than working from a position that sees only two options for attaining both freedom and peace – coercion or disengaged coexistence – Hollenbach argues that “engagements with others by listening, speaking, and thinking with them about the quality of the lives we must in fact live together can lead to enhanced prospects for both freedom and peace.”<sup>272</sup>

It would seem that PCO can be considered as a first step forward on the road that Hollenbach has proposed as they engaged with the public square via their Catholic-based convictions and political objections as specified in the idea of the common good. PCO seems to be aware that the construction of the common good requires dialogue and interaction with the Catholic community, as well as Americans of other faiths and Americans of no faith tradition. In doing this they are willing to postpone an immediate solution to the question of abortion if other items relevant to the list of that constitute social justice and the common good are addressed. Addressing these problems, eventually, they believe, may lead to a solution to the abortion problem via a different route. PCO both engaged with each other and their fellow Catholics from a position of dialogue and addressed the plurality of the nation in their dialogue regarding their positions on the common good and how their Catholic matrix compelled them to support Obama. Although Hollenbach’s notion that the common good is something that has to be achieved

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<sup>270</sup> Ibid, 140.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid, 141.

<sup>272</sup> Ibid, 142.



through deliberation does not correlate exactly with PCO's ideas, it is yet another call echoing Connolly and Taylor, in their entreaty for the creation of a general space of engagement and debate in which a secular kind of reasoning is not necessarily always preeminent or correct.

Historically, PCO appears to fit into a consistent but diverse tradition of Catholic activism in the twentieth century. The historical section of this thesis demonstrates how Catholics, at different periods in American history, have negotiated with and met the challenge of being a minority religion in a country which at once promotes democratic discourse and debate and, ironically since the election of the first Catholic president, has driven religiously based dialogue into the private realm. Although Kennedy's statements pushed religion into the private realm of American society, the resurgence of public religions as demonstrated by Casanova posed a challenge to Kennedy's embrace of the secularist position and secularization theory. In the U.S., this resurgence was dominated by the Evangelical Right and later by conservative Catholics such as Neuhaus and Weigel. PCO's progressive intervention was ironically prepared by the opening forged on the public sphere by conservative Christian groups who, unlike their liberal counterparts, were successful in gaining the attention of a major political party in the Republicans. However, PCO is not new in the Catholic tradition of social and political activism. It clearly contains elements of Dorothy Day's Catholic Worker movement and the Christian Family movement, experiences of Catholic separatism and "otherness," Vatican II influences, principles issued by the USCCB on economic and social justice, and the weightiness of the unabating question of abortion and legitimacy of *Roe v. Wade* in its collective psyche and identity. This case study on PCO's brief development and existence during the summer and fall of 2008 demonstrates how the group successfully created a place for its arguments and positions to be heard within a public sphere that, thanks in part to Obama's embrace of faith-based

political action and the previously exerted political pressure on electoral politics by Christian conservatives, appears to have widened, thus offering a place for religious progressives.

It seems clear from the evidence and analysis presented that PCO has positioned itself at the edge between a separatist Catholic culture that is still important and alive and an ethical and political culture of the “common good” that seeks alliances and compromises with other political and cultural groups with whom it can share Catholic informed but not restrictive principles enunciated in the principles of general Catholic social teaching. Further, in crafting a nuanced stance on Obama’s “pro-choice” position and highlighting other key issues in the Obama platform which coincided with important ethical concerns of Catholic thought, PCO made various interventions into a public square, where positions of progressive Catholics had not been prominently featured during the last decade. The group has achieved its current location in this long debate about the position of religiously informed views in the public square and in relation to secularism to a large extent by both abandoning the pre-Vatican II Roman Catholic Church’s policy of cultural separatism<sup>273</sup> and by embracing a culture of political action and engagement with the world as recommended by the Second Vatican Council.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>273</sup> Kane, 13.

<sup>274</sup> Korzen and Kelley, 21.

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